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ISRAEL'S WANDERINGS

IN THE

WILDERNESS.

BY THE

REV. G. D. KRUMMACHER,

OF ELBERFELD.

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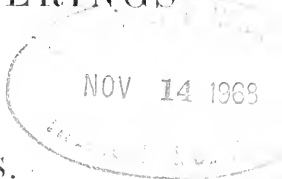
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ISRAEL'S

WANDERINGS IN THE WILDERNESS.



I.

DEPARTURE FROM RAMESES, AND ENCAMPMENT IN SUCCOTH.



THE apostle Paul, when referring to the history of the children of Israel, and especially to their passage through the wilderness, in his first epistle to the Corinthians, ch. x. ver. 6, observes, that “these things were for our examples.” In that chapter he alludes to the Red Sea, the manna, and the rock, even as Christ also adduces the brazen serpent (John iii. 14.) The forty years’ journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness has, generally speaking, attracted great attention in every age. The Lord himself, in Deut. viii., mentions several important reasons for it—that every thing might be made manifest that was in their hearts—to humble them, in order afterwards to do them good—that they might not say, “my power and the might

of my hand have gotten me this prosperity"—and that they might not suppose it was because of their righteousness and the sincerity of their hearts, that they came into possession of the land of Canaan. The history of the wanderings of God's ancient people is also the history of his people in every age, and, with some exceptions, will continue to be so, until their arrival in Canaan.

The names of the various places where they encamped had long since attracted my attention. I knew that they had all their signification, and I was also of opinion that they contained in them something important and instructive. For "all scripture given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness." (2 Tim. iii. 16.) We know the importance attached to names in the Holy Scriptures, some of which were even given by the express command of God himself: and we see from the Epistle to the Hebrews, what important inferences are drawn from the meaning of the word "Melchizedek." Hence I sought to ascertain the meaning of the names of the various places where the children of Israel encamped in their journey through the desert; and when it was difficult to determine the precise interpretation, and the word admitted of more than one signification, even this circumstance appeared instructive to me, since the Christian is also led in paths which he frequently knows not how to designate. May our meditations on this subject tend to mutual edification, and be accompanied by the divine blessing!

NUMB. xxxiii. 1—5.

“ These are the journeys of the children of Israel, which went forth out of the land of Egypt with their armies, under the hand of Moses and Aaron.

“ And Moses wrote their goings out, according to their journeys, by the commandment of the Lord, and these are their journeys, according to their goings out.

“ And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month : on the morrow after the pass-over the children of Israel went out with a high hand, in the sight of all the Egyptians.

“ (For the Egyptians buried all their first-born, which the Lord had smitten among them ; upon their gods also the Lord executed judgments.)

“ And the children of Israel removed from Rameses, and pitched in Succoth.”

It was at the Lord's express command, that Moses has described, in this chapter, the various encampments of the children of Israel, and since it contains little more than a list of names, ought we not to inquire what was the object of this command ? Does it contain any thing that may be useful and profitable to us ? Do we find, in the various movements of God's ancient people, the footsteps of the flock of Christ ? May not the soul's inward guidance have much in it that resembles the outward journeyings of the Israelites through the wilderness ; and would it not be pleasing to perceive that we were also there, where they encamped when arriving at Succoth, Elim, or Horgidgad ? They were also not permitted to encamp where they pleased ; but, like ourselves, were obliged to follow the fiery and cloudy pillar, and to remain in their position until it gave the signal for departure.

The residence of the children of Israel in Egypt may serve as an image of our state by nature. Pharaoh represents Satan as well as the law, even as Egypt the world with its enjoyments. And although the latter may be, in reality, but as offensive garlic and the tear-exciting onion, yet the corrupt taste of the natural man, who knows nothing better, prefers them to every other, particularly to the manna which constitutes the food of angels, and hungers solely after them. For does not the carnally-minded man exclusively seek after earthly wealth and temporal gratification? How ardent are his desires after these, whilst no description of heavenly enjoyments is able to excite his appetite!

Israel was perfectly satisfied with the land of Goshen, without longing after Canaan, the land promised to their forefathers, although described to them as a land flowing with milk and honey; and ah! is not the case the same with us all by nature? With reference to the latter, they certainly fared better in Egypt than in the desert; and why should we deny that the christian course is one that is painful to nature? Paul even asserts, that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." Christ does not leave us in doubt on this point; but declares that "whoever will be his disciple, must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow him." Christians are soldiers of Jesus Christ; and we all know that a state of warfare is opposed to a state of ease and security. The Christian has not only to strive against his own flesh and blood, but when these are overcome, he has still to wrestle with principalities and powers, and the rulers of wickedness in high places. The plucking out the right eye, and the cutting off the right hand, is no

easy work; and the working out our salvation is frequently accompanied with fear and trembling.

The world with its pleasures and delights is a dangerous foe, and holds captive the great mass of mankind. We must not, however, be conformed to it, but come out from it, touch nothing unclean, and seek the things that are above. Pharaoh is a type of Satan; for he keeps mankind in bondage. They must therefore be aroused, in order to escape from the snare of the devil, and turn from the power of Satan unto God. He is called a god of this world, who carries on his work in the hearts of the children of disobedience; and a strong man armed, who keepeth his palace. As a cunning serpent, he understands how to deceive and seduce, and can even assume the guise of an angel of light, apparently deserving of all credence. Like a strong lion, he tears his prey, and seeks to destroy the people of God from the earth, even as Pharaoh wished to do towards Israel. Some he terrifies by his dreadful roar; others he seeks to lull to sleep; and is continually roaming about in search of some one to devour.

Pharaoh is also a type of the law—that law which can save no man. By it, no one is enabled to love God and his neighbour, though strictly enjoined to do so. Yet by the apprehension and distress it occasions, it renders the individual anxious for his salvation, and capable of receiving the gospel. As long as it went well with Israel in Egypt, Moses effected little by promising to conduct them to Canaan. Is not the case the same with the preaching of the gospel? How is any one to be induced to seek for salvation, who is well satisfied without it? What attractions will the mes-

sage of the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Jesus Christ have for those, who are careless about their sins, or even think themselves so religious, that they regard it as a species of insult, when the forgiveness of sins is represented to them as a great blessing? How should those be induced to take refuge with Jesus, and earnestly to supplicate his salvation, who either do not regard themselves as miserable sinners, who are unable to obtain it by their own efforts, or to whom sin is no burden, no torment, nor bondage; from which they seek above all things to be delivered? Distress, grief, apprehension, and sorrow—not of a natural, but of a spiritual kind—must first be excited; the man then listens attentively, when mention is made of a deliverer. The work of redemption begins with the feelings of sorrow, wretchedness, and distress, and the law is well adapted to produce this effect.

This is represented to us in the person of Pharaoh. He destroyed the happiness which the children of Israel had previously enjoyed in his territory, and in the pleasant province of Goshen. He made them miserable; and by this very means, excited in them an ardent desire to be delivered from his thralldom. He first made heavy demands upon them, compelling them daily to furnish a certain number of bricks, which if not delivered in full tale, brought upon them severe treatment from their taskmasters. At length they were so harshly dealt with, that it was impossible for them to furnish the requisite quantity, since the materials were not afforded them, and yet the full number was demanded. On bringing their complaint before Pharaoh, they were received very ungraciously, and reviled

as idle people. "Ye are idle—ye are idle!" was the sole reply; and thus their distress and anxiety rose to its height.

Mankind all wish to be saved by their own doings, and know of no other way. They excuse their short comings on the score of human weakness, and will not admit that the law requires a perfect obedience. Those who go a step further, lead a virtuous life, really do much good, and possess many amiable qualities, and thus are fully persuaded that they cannot fail to be saved. The law causes them no anxiety and distress, and it fares with them as with the children of Israel, before taskmasters were set over them. They lived very contentedly, and had no desire for the promised land. But Paul speaks of a period of his inward life, in which "the law came;" and it comes to every awakened soul, as a task and schoolmaster. The question, "what must I do to be saved?" becomes all-important to him. He now resolves in earnest to amend his life, and seeks to carry his purpose into effect. For this purpose, he adds prayer for the divine assistance, and is confident that the Lord will grant him success in his endeavours. But with all his efforts, he finds it is like attempting to repair an old house, which, the further the work is proceeded with, proves to be only the more ruinous, so that, after all, it must be entirely pulled down, and a new one erected. The wide extent of the commandments and their spiritual nature, become increasingly apparent to such individuals; they see with Paul, that desire itself is sin, and at length make the painful discovery, that sin has still possession of them. They then feel as the children of Israel did, when straw for their bricks was no longer furnished

them—that is, they are able to do less than before, and yet more is required of them. If they complain, a voice tells them they are idle, they are not sufficiently sincere and in earnest, they are deficient in prayer and faith. They seek to do all the work themselves, and if they fail in any part, they are bitterly reproved. Their consciences torment them, the holiness and righteousness of God affright them, the threatenings of a broken law terrify them, so that they know not what to do, especially since their best resolutions are devoid of power to give their hearts a durable bias to that which is good. They now resemble the children of Israel in their distress, and thus they are prepared for the reception of the gospel.

Pharaoh intended nothing less than Israel's entire destruction. Thus the law also announces its threatenings, its curses, and eternal perdition to those who disobey it. Nor is it possible to satisfy it. Its requirements extend to infinity, and the individual, at length, entirely despairs of ever fulfilling them. In like manner, the Israelites, when they could endure the hard bondage no longer, were by this very means rendered susceptible of deliverance. Egypt's enjoyments were entirely embittered to them; but the oppression they suffered, rendered their deliverance the more glorious to them.

They were delivered, and that, too, by the outstretched arm of God. They departed out of Egypt before the eyes of the Egyptians, who were so occupied in burying their dead, that no man hindered them. Their first halt was made at RAMESES. How remarkable the name! It signifies a dissolving of evil, and the thunder of joy. And is not this in accordance

with experience? Does not joyful exultation arise from the removal of evil? And how great must have been the joy of the children of Israel, how audible even in the distance, on seeing themselves really delivered from the hand of Pharaoh, and all his tyranny! If, when subsequently delivered from Babylon, they were like those that dream, and their mouth was filled with laughter, and their tongue with singing, how will it eventually be with the weary warrior, when released from this earthly scene of conflict, for ever released, and introduced into everduring repose! Will not the place at which he first arrives, be called Rameses, the loud utterance of joy? But something of a similar nature occurs even here, especially when the agonizing soul, after no longer seeing any outlet, and thinking deliverance impossible—after renouncing all idea of ever enjoying one more happy hour on earth, and being dispirited and almost in despair, on being sought to be encouraged by others, and on seeing others joyful and happy—when such an individual all at once is called from darkness to light in the Lord, and enabled to show forth his virtues and his praise—then Rameses appears, and songs and acclamations of joy resound. Such a one is then scarcely able to give utterance to all his joy, and thankfulness, and love; he not only forgets all that he has endured, but would willingly have endured ten times as much, and ten times as long. His ardour, gratitude, and the love of Christ, constrain him to devote himself irrevocably to Christ and his service, whatever it may cost him. In such a state of mind he exclaims, “I have sworn, and will perform it, that I will keep thy statutes!” He then calls upon others,

saying, "Come and hear, all ye that fear the Lord, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul!" "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving-kindness and with tender mercy!" "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit."

Now, all at once, the beautiful fruits of the Spirit appear in the individual in all their loveliness, even as in spring, after a genial shower, the earth suddenly puts off her wintry garb, and decks herself with the festive robe of spring. Sin, a wounded conscience, fear, and doubt, are fled, and in their place, blooms the kingdom of God in the soul—righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. All this is something entirely new to the distressed soul, and is something of that which has never entered into the heart of the natural man, and which God has prepared for them that love him. No wonder if the man breaks out into exclamations of joy in such a manner as to be often unable to keep them to himself, but feels constrained to communicate them to others, although it may be said of such, "These men are full of sweet wine." No wonder, also, if he now makes the greatest promises, and thinks himself able to keep them. He regards no sufferings too grievous; but his Lord, who hath loved him and given himself for him, may lay upon him whatever he pleases; no self-denial, no sacrifice, no duty, seems now too hard for him; for

his grateful love knows no bounds. In particular, he is now resolved continually to cherish an unlimited confidence in Jesus, to which he is invited by every page of Scripture, which now becomes so astonishingly clear to him, that it shines upon his path like the star in the east to the magi, and points him to Jesus, without any other guide. However, he who has been at Rameses, knows how joyfully he felt there. No earthly joy is comparable to it, and every one ought reasonably to go and sell all that he hath, in order to purchase this pearl, which enriches more than any other treasure, and adorns more than any other jewel.

This was the first encampment, and the penitent soul is wont to receive such a hearty welcome into the kingdom of Jesus Christ, as is typified by the festivities celebrated on the return of the prodigal son, the joy at finding again the lost sheep, and the piece of silver, respecting which, Jesus speaks in Luke xv. Certainly this joy is not in every instance equally great, even as the work of repentance is not equally painful, and the one is generally regulated by the other. Every one, however, receives some refreshing and gracious communications, which remain ever memorable to him.

Hence it is no wonder, that the second encampment is called SUCCOTH, that is, tents or tabernacles; for such is also the case in the spiritual route of the children of God. This appellation reminds us of the expectations, desires, and hopes of those who are thus refreshed and exhilarated; they think it will always continue so. The grounds of their faith appear so certain and evident to them, that they find it difficult to conceive how they should ever feel otherwise. The

single passage, "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," is of itself ground and basis sufficient for their faith. Thus they think, and appear to come to a very correct conclusion. Hence they say with David, "I shall never be moved;" and with Peter on the mount of transfiguration, "Lord, it is good to be here!" thus making known their wishes to remain there, at least for a season, if not for ever.

But the word Succoth, or tabernacles, signifies also something moveable and unsettled. Tabernacles are not houses designed to exist for a long period, but, like tents, require only poles, cords, and curtains; and they are soon erected, but may as easily be taken down and transported elsewhere.

Not only in this lower world are earthly things very mutable, but also the communications of grace. The Scriptures speak of evening and morning in a spiritual sense; of verdant pastures and dark vallies. We dwell in Succoth, in tabernacles, and ought not to think it strange, in a religious point of view, if frequent changes are experienced. Let it suffice us, that the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever, and his loving-kindness unto all generations.

II.

REMOVAL TO ETHAM.

REMARKABLE is the description which the Lord Jesus gives of the qualities and privileges of those whom he calls his sheep, and towards whom he acts the part of a shepherd. He calls them sheep chiefly on account of their helplessness and defenceless nature, and because their welfare entirely depends on having a good shepherd. He calls them *his* in opposition to those of whom he had said, in the preceding verse, that they were not his. He calls them *his*, because he has purchased and redeemed them; and because he made them, and not they themselves—they are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. By nature no one is a sheep of Jesus Christ, nor can become so in his own strength. They are his workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus.

Our Lord attributes two properties to them. The first is, *that they hear his voice*—that powerful voice which calls the dead to life; not in the outward ear, but by a power in the heart, which operates wonderfully there. They turn away their ears from the world, however it may allure or entice, either as it respects its maxims or its conduct. Hence their second quality is, *that they follow Jesus*. A sheep is naturally a very

tractable creature, for although it is not easily dragged along by a cord, and resists constraint, yet it does not require the latter, being naturally inclined to follow a leader, particularly when congregated together. They follow their shepherd whithersoever he goeth, nor would fire or water be able to restrain them.

The privileges enjoyed by the Lord's flock are four-fold. *He knows them*; and on this every thing depends. Then all is well, however strangely they may appear to be led and guided. *He gives them eternal life*. What a present! *He* gives it—not they. He has merited, and he bestows it upon whom he will; and no one obtains it but those that seek it in his appointed way; no one can purchase it, for he vouchsafes it gratuitously. *And they shall never perish*; although it may appear as if this were sometimes the case, yet it never happens, however perilous may be their situation, and however piteously they may exclaim, “we perish!” *And no one shall pluck them out of his hand*. Many make the attempt—not only flesh and blood, and unbelief, and evil concupiscence, but still more dangerous foes—principalities and powers. But no one, says Jesus, shall succeed. He is stronger than all. Such is the case also with the people of God, whose history we now resume.

NUMB. xxxiii. 6.

“And they departed from Succoth, and pitched in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness.”

Such is the name of the third encampment. Succoth means tabernacles or tents; and when a number of these are together, they form a camp. The ancient

people of God, therefore, formed a camp, and this is still the case with the church of God. It lies on the martial plain, ready for the fight. The Lord's wonderful guidance began to manifest itself even at Succoth; for in removing thither, they already deviated from the direct and beaten path, which would have led them, through Philistia, in twelve or fourteen days to Canaan. Upon that road, they would have had no mountains to climb, no howling desert to traverse, and no sea would have opposed their progress—but at the same time no sea to have at once overwhelmed all their foes—no opportunity of becoming so well acquainted with God in his goodness and faithfulness, and with themselves, in their naughtiness and depravity, nor would they have experienced so many remarkable manifestations of both. Certainly, had the choice been left to them, they would have selected the beaten path; but the Lord led them, and thus their course was often contrary to, and beyond reason.

Here you may make many an instructive remark. You know that there are two roads which lead to eternity—the one broad and beaten, but which leads to perdition—the other narrow, which is entered by a strait gate, which leads to life, and is found by few.

The Christian's path is mostly very different from what he either wished or anticipated. Had he had to mark it out—it would not have been so humiliating to nature, nor so glorifying to grace. In a short time, he would have been so strong, righteous, and wise in himself, that he would have needed no Christ, either as the door or the way. But the Lord's thoughts are very different. He brings to nought that which is, that he may be all in all, and that no flesh may glory

in his presence. The man gradually loses his own life, and with it all his own strength; and then it is, that he clings solely to grace. How great did the disciples wish to be; but how little did they become!

The way to Canaan is, generally speaking, a very different one to that which reason knows or anticipates. The Christian is dealt with according to the 32d Psalm, "*I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way that thou shalt go.*" Were a rational man to have seen the children of Israel removing from Rameses to Succoth, from thence to Etham, and afterwards to Pi-hahiroth, in order to go to Canaan—he would have been obliged to have regarded them as insane; for they deviated more and more from the high road. And are not true Christians—is not the doctrine of the gospel regarded as foolish by the wise of this world? O that all Christians, in their whole conduct and deportment, might prove themselves to be such as are not of this world, nor walk according to its maxims! Doctrines, which receive the approbation and applause of the world and the wise of this world, are certainly no evangelical doctrines; for the more they are so, the less are they commended, however acceptable may be the mode of their exhibition.

At Succoth, the children of Israel baked the dough, which they had brought with them out of Egypt, with their other provisions. They were not yet required to live solely by faith. But this stock was soon consumed, and whither were they then to look? At the commencement of the christian course, the individual is still generally able to do much, or at least believes that he is. Peter girded himself whilst young, and went whither he would; but afterwards he was obliged to

stretch out his hands, and another girded him, and led him whither he would not. He was willing to die with Jesus, and thought himself strong enough to keep his promise. In the sequel, we do not find that he was bold enough to promise much; but hear him saying, "Be ye clothed with humility," and "The God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after ye have suffered awhile, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Self-ability is gradually consumed and disappears, like the provisions brought by the children of Israel out of Egypt. To whom shall we then look? Christ himself informs us: "I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me, ye can do nothing." O Israel, how wilt thou be compelled to live by faith, when once thou enterest into the wilderness, where there is not even water sufficient? Yet the Lord is with thee, and that is enough. And at length, when the question shall be put, "Have ye lacked any thing?" You will be constrained to reply, "Lord, never!"

On marching out of Succoth, the Lord himself undertook to be their visible leader. They had already entered upon a frightful sandy desert, which was surrounded on both sides with lofty mountains. The Lord then moved on before them in the cloudy and fiery pillar, to show them the way, and also when they should pitch their tents, and when go forward. It was in the form of a lofty pillar. During the day, it extended itself over them like a thick cloud, and thus protected them against the intolerable heat. If they had to travel by night, it cast a brilliant light around. This escort was extremely needful to the Israelites in the terrific wilderness, in which there was no way, and even where it had been

often trodden, the wind whirled the sand together in such a manner, that those who followed, were unable to distinguish the track of those that had preceded, every trace being immediately obliterated by the wind. When they had to rest in any particular place, the pillar of cloud stood still by day, and the pillar of fire by night. When they were to remove, it lifted itself up, and went before them. Thus they were escorted and guided during the whole of the period, by the Lord himself.

This pillar is a type of Christ. By his mediatorial righteousness, he protects the penitent sinner against the consuming fire of the divine holiness and justice, having atoned for us by his blood. What is more pleasing and refreshing in the sultry heat of summer than a cool shade? This is afforded the distressed conscience by Jesus' wounds. Hence also it is said, in Isaiah xxv. 4, "Thou art the strength of the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the rage of the tyrants is as a storm against the wall."

It also represents him in his prophetic and kingly office; for as he teaches them, so he leads them and protects them from impending danger. This the Psalmist experienced. "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night"—neither real nor imaginary dangers shall injure them. "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel," says Asaph, "and afterwards receive me to glory." Now even as without him, we cannot do what we ought—neither ought we, without him, to wish to do what we are able. Our will ought to die, that his may live in us. At one time, the children of Israel went forward—at another, they

rested ; sometimes they travelled for days together—sometimes only for a few hours ; at one time by day, at another by night. Occasionally they remained very long in a place—at other times only a short period—all according to the direction and movements of the cloudy pillar. The Lord alone is the best guide—no other can equal him. The various changes we experience under his leading, induce us at length to give up our hearts entirely to the Lord, and render us well satisfied with his ways.

The same pillar combined two qualities ; it was both a cloud and a fire. This indicates the two natures in Christ, the divine and human, as well as his state of humiliation and exaltation. They had it continually before their eyes, and so ought we to look unto Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith.” They were entirely ignorant of the way, and what way or means do we know, out of Christ, of being reconciled unto God, obtaining the righteousness which avails before him, of being redeemed from all unrighteousness, and enabled to serve him, without fear, all our lives long ? How could we, without him, have a moment’s peace, seeing that our determined foes, the devil, the world, and our own flesh and blood, never cease to assail us ? How should we ever see the light, if he did not shine upon those that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to give the knowledge of salvation in the remission of sins, and to guide our feet into the way of peace ? We require the antitype as much as they did the type. Without him we know nothing ; without him we have, and are, and can do nothing. Therefore, O Lord, abide with us, and guide us by thy counsel, since we know not the way !

The cloudy pillar directed the Israelites from Succoth to *Etham*. Here began the horrible desert, at the entrance of which it lay. Had they been permitted to direct their march according to human judgment, it would have been the most prudent to have proceeded to the left; for then they would have had nothing to do with the Red Sea. Moses had also probably become acquainted with that part of the country, whilst tending the flocks of Jethro. But they were obliged to travel directly towards the Red Sea. How wonderful! Is human knowledge and ability to be so entirely thrown aside, and nothing be left them but the Lord and faith in his name? Ah, things were to be still more deplorable—at least their poverty was to be still greater; for they still had provisions with them. But what are they to do, when all is consumed? No one can then help but God alone; and who is there who voluntarily places himself in such circumstances?

The signification of the word *Etham*, is remarkable; for it means *perfect* and *sincere*. We may regard this either as a requirement, or as a gift and attribute. *Etham*—perfection and security—regarded as a requirement, is something difficult; for setting aside perfection altogether, even sincerity is a great and difficult matter. But it is indispensably necessary; for God looks at the heart, and requireth truth in the inward parts. The heart of man is by nature deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Hence *sincerity* is a thing of primary importance to the souls that are seeking salvation; and they often scruple to ascribe to themselves this valuable and important attribute, and that with reason; for it does not so much depend upon the degree of penitential sorrow, nor on the

strength and confidence of faith, on the extent of self-denial or the ardour of love—but upon their genuineness. Pure gold will stand the fiery test; hence the purity and not the quantity is to be regarded. Those who feel the importance of eternal things, are often not a little perplexed, when deficient in that testimony of the spirit, which bears witness that the spirit is truth. They then think, “ True, I mourn over my sins; I have frequently been able to believe with joy that they are forgiven me, and that Christ is made unto me wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption; promises have often been impressed on my mind with peculiar loveliness and power, at which I felt great joy, and poured out my soul in praise and thanksgiving; I strive and pray against the sin that is within me; I endeavour to keep myself unspotted from the world, and desire to make progress in the path of life. Yes, I must confess, that I am poor in spirit, that I mourn, that I hunger and thirst after righteousness. But is all this of the right kind? is it so as it ought to be in the sight of God?—this is what causes me anxiety.” The state of the soul also may be occasionally so strange, and flesh and spirit strive against each other in such a manner, that the individual himself cannot understand it; and there are also spiritual seasons, in which, even as in spring, it snows and storms as if it were winter, until the sun breaks through.

Instances are perhaps rare of barefaced hypocrisy, in which the individual purposely assumes the mask of piety; but so much the more frequent is that subtle dissimulation by which the man himself is deceived more than others. Such persons suppose themselves good Christians, but are not so; they have the name that

they live, and yet are dead; they say "we are rich and have need of nothing," and know not that they are poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked. It is therefore highly important to be upon our guard against self-deception, and to know, that He who at first made man upright, must also produce true sincerity in us, or we should never attain to it. It was on this account also, that the children of Israel were led about for so long a period, that they might learn to know that it was not from the natural sincerity of their own hearts, that they entered Canaan. And all Christians must let themselves be led into this department of self-knowledge, and become conscious that if they possess sincerity and uprightness of heart, they have it not from themselves.

The word Etham signifies also a ploughshare, with which the soil is turned up. The spiritual ploughshare is the living word of God, which, "divideth asunder the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart;" by it, our hearts are broken up, and that which was concealed in them is brought to light. The individual has then reason to pray, at the sight of his inward impurities, "Create in me a clean heart, O God! and renew a right spirit within me!" for true sincerity causes us to present ourselves before God as we really are, with all our nakedness and naughtiness, without justifying or excusing ourselves. Then, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity."

Israel, encamped in Etham, is rooted in sincerity, and thus all is well.

Tham, Etham, also signifies perfect. The law requires a perfect obedience, and if our consciences are

to be pacified by works, the latter must necessarily be perfect and conformable to the divine law. The natural man indeed is satisfied, if he has only in some measure fulfilled his duty. But the awakened individual, the further he advances under the guidance of the fiery and cloudy pillar, perceives the more clearly, that "by the works of the law, no flesh living can be justified." Etham then truly manifests itself as a ploughshare. This causes labour and exertion, and the more pains the man takes, the more obviously does he discern his depravity, and the impossibility of obtaining his object in the way prescribed by the commandments, or of yielding the perfection they require, because not the smallest deficiency is permitted.

The gospel offers perfection—the perfection which is in Christ Jesus; for his people are "complete in him." The sight of this astonishes the soul, so that Luther says, not improperly, "I know not whither to go with all the righteousness I have in Christ." The soul that seeks salvation alone in Christ, sees in him, perfect obedience for all its disobedience—perfect righteousness for all its unrighteousness—and perfect holiness for all its unholiness. Forsaking, therefore, all self-dependence, the man founds his obedience, righteousness, and holiness alone in Christ, unites himself to him by faith, and thus presents himself to the Father, through this perfect medium, and finds acceptance in the beloved. Therefore abiding thus in Christ, he dwells in Etham, in perfection.

But the true Christian possesses also a perfection with reference to his regeneration. Regarding this, it has been well said, that it is a perfection of the parts although not of the stature or measure. It is called a

new man. Now even as in a new born, well-proportioned infant, all the members are perfect, although they have not yet attained their full size, so it is also with the new creature, or new man ; and consequently we find the people of God addressed in Scripture, in their several stages of growth, as little children, young men, and fathers in Christ. In every renewed individual, there is light in the understanding, love in the will, the affections are regulated, and the members of the body used as instruments of righteousness. But all this may be in a very weak state, as in a little child.

There is light in the understanding ; but the individual's conceptions may still be very limited ; so that Jesus once said to his disciples, " How is it ye do not understand ?" He may still have many incorrect ideas and be mistaken in many things. He still speaks, as Paul says, like a child, understands like a child, and thinks like a child ; as, for instance, that he is greater than he really is, and can accomplish more than he is able. Thus we hear the disciples disputing amongst themselves, who was the greatest amongst them, and hear them confidently reply in the affirmative to the question put them by Jesus, " Are ye able to drink of the cup which I drink of ?" But he was obliged to tell them, " I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now."

There is love in their will, and their affections are regulated. They weep and cry for the Lord, as a child for the breast ; they are willing to give up all for him ; and they love the brethren. But does not the apostle say to the same believers at Corinth, to whom he had said, " ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our

God"—“Ye are still babes in Christ, and carnal; for here is among you envying, and strife, and divisions.” (1 ^{Corinth} Ep. iii. 3.) There are children in Christ, which require milk, and cannot bear strong food; so that all truths are not exactly for all. There are young men, who are strong, and have overcome the wicked one, as well as fathers, who know him that is from the beginning. This should moderate our judgments of others, as well as our judgment of ourselves; especially ought it to prevent us from thinking too highly of ourselves, and incite us to follow after perfection, that Christ may be formed within us. But anxious souls ought not to doubt of the existence of the new creature within them, because the latter is still weak; and learn to make a due distinction between the perfection of the parts and the fulness of the stature, that they may bring forth fruit in patience.

They pitched in Etham, in sincerity and perfection. The Lord seeth the heart, and uprightness is acceptable to him. “The way of the just is upright; thou, most upright, dost weigh the path of the just.” O, blessed is the man, in whose spirit there is no guile! Him will the Lord instruct, and lead in the way in which he ought to go!

III.

PIHAHIROTH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 7.

“ And they removed from Etham, and turned again into Pihahiroth, which is before Baalzephon, and they pitched in Migdol.”

WE have lately seen Israel in Etham, and beheld them encamped in sincerity and perfection. ‘Perfection!’ is perhaps the exclamation of some; ‘Ah, how much we fall short of that! How much impurity is still felt, how much labour and strife must still be endured; into what straits may a Christian still fall! Perfection—alas! vainly do we expect it in this land of Mesech, and therefore we long for its attainment in a better country, even a heavenly one!’ This is certainly a very true complaint. But we live in faith, and faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen; and therefore faith lays hold of perfection, though still encompassed with infirmity; and of righteousness, though feeling the remains of indwelling sin. Faith calculates on different principles to those of reason.

Israel, on removing from Etham, fell into amazing straits and unspeakable distress. The pillar of cloud lifted itself up. They rose up also, and followed it.

For it is the Lord that bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. It was the Lord who conducted his eleven disciples to the Mount of Olives, and three of them into Gethsemane. We are inclined, indeed, to give the greatest preference to Rameses, where we sing aloud for joy; but are also satisfied in Etham, where we learn to understand our perfection in Christ, or feel our sincerity in opposition to every conflicting emotion. The individual does not then consider through what streams and flames of fire he must pass, although he has the promise, "when thou goest through the waters, they shall not overflow thee; and through the fires, the flame shall not kindle upon thee." He does not reflect on the furnaces of affliction, in which he has to be purified, nor on the "sharp east wind, by which his iniquity shall be purged, the fruit of which shall be to take away his sin." (Isa. xxvii. 8, 9.) Had the Israelites known all that would have befallen them, they would not have departed so gladly from Egypt, and such is also the case with many a Christian. For it is "through much tribulation that we must enter into the kingdom of heaven."

From Etham they removed to Pihahiroth, which is before Baalzephon. This route conducted them towards the Red Sea; just as if they were being led to unavoidable destruction, since they might have reached Mount Sinai by a straighter road, and have left the Red Sea on the right. Moses, who was doubtless well acquainted with the desert, from having kept sheep forty years in Midian, seems to have been inclined to have chosen a different route. But Moses was obliged to renounce his own judgment in the matter, because the Lord commanded him to take another road. He

also mentioned to him the reason of this command; for, said he, "Pharaoh will say, They are entangled in the land; the wilderness hath shut them in." And how often and how long is the Gospel regarded as error, and even as dangerous doctrine? Nay, it frequently happens that carnal reason inquires in the Christian, 'Where am I?' and thinks the path he is treading cannot possibly be the way to Canaan, but to perdition—as its intention really is—but only the perdition of the old man, not merely in his generally acknowledged sinfulness, but also in all his wisdom, righteousness, and strength.

The Lord also added, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them, and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and all his host, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord." The stronger the faith, the more painful the trials. Moses only understood that the Lord would be honoured, but knew not in what manner; at least, he did not understand why a march towards the Red Sea was necessary for that purpose. He did not, however, inquire, but believed and waited.

We often know not the meaning of that which befalls us, even as Peter knew not the use of the foot-washing. And to how many, as well as Peter, is it said, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." O, how well pleasing to God it would be, if, like Moses, we always believed and obeyed, denied ourselves, trusted in the Lord, and yielded ourselves up to him as the great I AM, when our wisdom and strength are no more! And how gratifying to see the people removing from Etham to Pihahiroth, because the Lord and Moses led them thither,

without questioning and complaining? But will the imperfections now suppressed never break out again? The sequel will show us.

The situation of Pihahiroth was a critical one for the Israelites. It lay in a valley; before them the Red Sea; on both sides of them lofty and impassable mountains. Think of a surprise in such a position! Is it not enough to make one's hair stand on end? *Pi*, the first syllable of the name of their encampment, signifies mouth. And do they not seem to be here in the very jaws of the lion? Is it possible that the Lord can act thus with his children? and if he does so, is it both glorifying to him and beneficial to them? Are they really led in such a manner, that no other help remains but the Lord alone? Let your own experience reply.

Pi, therefore, means mouth. There is a time with many, when their religion lies mostly in the mouth and in talking, although it may have its root in the heart. They can converse in a scriptural and experimental, as well as pleasing manner, of religion and the Lord's guidance. It is a pleasure to hear them speak of the perfection of salvation in Christ Jesus, and of the dreadful depravity of human nature. It is pleasing to hear how they converse with the Lord in prayer, state every thing to him, and are able to pour out their hearts in a filial manner before him, as well as how admirably they are able to advise and encourage others. On hearing them, one would suppose they would not be easily confounded, but manifest their light and strength when it came to the point. Great value is also generally attached to this kind of discourse, and he is mostly regarded as the best Chris-

tian, who is able to talk the best. But speaking is, after all, the easiest part of religion. When called to put it into practice, many things are found different to what had been supposed. In the hour of distress, Moses lost the power to speak, and his crying to the Lord was only a heavy sigh, which burst from his oppressed heart, but which was a loud cry in the ears of God.

There is, however, something excellent in being able to speak on divine things. How delightful, when the mouth is able to open itself in a courageous confession of the truth, or pour itself out in loud thanksgivings to God! Something of the same kind is implied in the word Pihahiroth; for it may be translated the mouth of freedom. Previously, the children of Israel had been treated as slaves, and had been compelled, particularly in the latter part of the time, to groan under a severe yoke; since labour was demanded of them which exceeded all their strength. But though their state of bondage was so oppressive, yet they were unable to deliver themselves, or even to procure an alleviation. Paul, in Rom. vii., speaks also of a similar spiritual bondage, of being sold under sin, and held captive in it, which extorted from him the bitter cry, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

This term, Pihahiroth, is also applicable to the carnal and worldly-minded, who talk of freedom, and are nevertheless the servants of sin. They allow themselves much, without troubling themselves whether the word of God permits it, just as if it were a matter of course. At the same time, they laugh at those who live more strictly, and regard nothing as true

but that which can be proved to be so from Scripture. In short, their tongue walketh through the heavens, and their feet tread the broad road, which they will not suffer to be barred up, either by the doctrines or commands of Scripture, but live in opposition to the latter, and believe in contradiction to the former. No fiery and cloudy pillar has conducted them into this Pihahiroth, but their carnal mind, which is not subject to the law of God, and their flesh, which lusteth against the spirit. Examine yourselves if this be not your position. How happy would it be for you, if the Lord caused you to pass under the rod, and thus forced you into the bond of the covenant, (Ezek. xx. 37,) that you might humble yourselves under his mighty hand, in order that he might exalt you in due time; you would then prefer being quiet; you would rather hear than speak, and rather learn than judge.

It is also to humble his people, that the Lord leads them to places thus trying. There they learn how frail human nature is: they are there brought to despair of themselves and every creature aid, and to apply to the Lord alone; the influences of divine grace are there rendered the more precious to them, and they cleave the more closely to Jesus, because they are conscious that no man can receive any thing, unless it be given him from heaven, and that all which flows from him must also return to him; there they are cured of self-exaltation, so that although enjoying the richest communications of divine grace, they do not elevate themselves above even the poorest or the weakest of the Lord's people, since God is able to strengthen the latter, and withdraw the gifts bestowed

on themselves; they rejoice also with trembling, and are thus prepared for a glorious deliverance; which was likewise the reason why the tribes of Israel were directed to Pihahiroth.

The Christian may also be said to be encamped at this station, when possessing liberty of speech and action in the midst of trying and painful circumstances. What liberty and courage did the three young men possess, even in the face of the burning fiery furnace, and in the presence of the enraged and mighty monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, when they answered and said to the king, "Our God whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and out of thy hand, O king! But if not, be it known unto thee, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image thou hast set up." What courage did Daniel manifest, in praying with his windows open, although whoever offered a petition in three days to any one but to the king, was to be cast into the lions' den! What boldness and liberty did Stephen possess before the Jewish council, and, after him, the host of martyrs, whose mouth no tortures could stop, nor cause to deviate a hair's-breadth from the truth! And in every age there have been those who, with the apostle, have been able to "glory in tribulation."

Thus is the Holy Spirit able to operate upon the poor, desponding, and unbelieving human heart, so that the man even wonders at his own boldness. Hence the anxious and fearful may take courage, and reflect, that even before they are aware, their hearts may be delivered from every shackle and restraint, and translated into an enlarged and expansive faith

by the power of the Holy Spirit. Frequently is it our lot to be “in heaviness through manifold temptations;” and happy is he, who, being thus driven into straits, is compelled to exert himself to the utmost in hastening to Christ! he shall in due time arrive at Pihahiroth, and be able to praise the Lord with joyful lips.

IV.

BAALZEPHON AND MIGDOL.

IN order rightly to comprehend and understand the frequently obscure and enigmatical guidance of most of the children of God, we must attend to the solution which God himself gives of it. This is afforded us in distinct terms, with reference to the guidance of the Israelites through the wilderness; but the latter also serves as a general rule; for all have the same object—humiliation and consequent exaltation. The former is termed, in the language of Scripture, being made poor, little, and weak, and manifests itself chiefly in the following manner. The individual is, first of all, divested of his self-complacency, by the discovery of the remaining impurities of his heart, of which he is not conscious until they are brought to light by some particular occurrence. Next, the man's own power is gradually taken from him, in such a manner, that he loses his own life, according to the precept of Christ; but what this implies, experience can best teach us. Paul, though he had long been an apostle, was in such circumstances as to be straitened and oppressed beyond measure, that he might not confide in himself. Our own wisdom is a third object of humiliation; for he

that trusteth to it is a fool. Asaph was desirous of understanding many things with regard to the reasons of the divine procedure, but was brought down so low, as to be compelled to say, "I was as a beast before thee." Job, who also thought himself wise, was stripped of all his greatness, and subjected to a severe scrutiny, in which God said to him, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" and he was obliged to confess, "I have uttered that which I understood not, and things too wonderful for me, which I knew not." Care is taken that no one is able to say, "through my wisdom I have prospered," which God took so much amiss of the heathenish Sennacherib, that he destroyed him because of it. Ought he therefore to endure it in his children? By no means! The fourth thing of which they are divested, is a secret pleasure in their own excellence and righteousness; which is certainly comprehended in the first; for when all that is in the heart is brought to light, this falls away of itself. "Not for the sake of thy own righteousness or the uprightness of thy heart dost thou enter into Canaan," is the language both of the Old and New Testament. God is angry with Tyrus for thinking herself so fair. Is it likely he will endure such a feeling in his children?

The being humbled is no pleasing affair. Hagar ran away from her mistress, when the latter wished to humble her; this we would do also, were we able: or at least we would gladly determine the mode of humiliation.

By keeping this object in view, much that is enigmatical will be rendered obvious to us, and that part of the history of Israel's guidance, which we are about to consider, will be divested of its obscurity.

NUMB. xxxiii. 7.

“ And they removed from Etham, and turned again unto Pihahiroth, which is before Baalzephon, and they pitched before Migdol.”

There are still some things worthy of remark respecting the encampment in Hahiroth; of which it is said, that it lies in a hollow, over against Baalzephon and Migdol.

It is at all times true, that the Christian takes up his position in a low place. With respect to himself, considered as destitute of divine grace, he lies in an abyss of wretchedness, the unfathomable depth of which becomes increasingly apparent to him; and hence he more and more clearly perceives, that he needs such a grace and such a righteousness as the gospel holds out.

It is therefore only natural that he should be stationed in the depth of humility—a humility which he cannot consider as a species of virtue, but which originates of itself, and says with Paul, “ I am nothing.” Lofty imaginations fall away more and more; and though the disciples might have carried them with the even to the cross, yet there they disappeared, and they became “ the little ones on whom the Lord turned his hand.” (Zech. xiii. 7.)

But their foundations are deeply laid also, as it respects their salvation, which has its root in the love and foreknowledge of God, who has chosen them before the foundation of the world, and has predestinated them to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to

the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. Their righteousness, which is not of themselves, is rooted in the bleeding wounds of the Son of God. Their renovation is of the operation of his Spirit, and all these gifts and graces, hopes and anticipations, result from the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. In one word, Christ, as he is made of God unto us, is the depth in which Israel is encamped, and the rock on which his church is built, against which nothing shall be able to prevail.

It certainly well repays the trouble to examine from time to time, on what our hopes are founded, and to ascertain whether we are resting in any measure upon ourselves, or solely upon the all-sufficient Saviour. And has this foundation been laid in thee, my reader—hast thou begun to perceive the extent of thy sinfulness and misery—and how thou mayest be delivered from all sin? Is thy own foundation completely overthrown, so that thou really lovest thy own life, and livest no more, but Christ is become thy life, without whom thou art unwilling and unable to do any thing?

We now direct our attention to the meaning of the words before us. Baal is a term of frequent occurrence in Scripture, and we know that the Jews served an idol of that name, whose worship Elijah and Jehu overthrew. Baal signifies one who has and possesses something, and is hence a lord. This name has manifestly something very encouraging for the poor Israelites. Hitherto, Pharaoh had been their Baal; at least he arrogated to himself the possession of them, and considered them as bond-slaves: he was therefore unwilling to part with them, because they were so useful to him. Their real Baal and possessor, however, was not Pha-

raoh, but the Lord, who would not forsake them. He engages to be with his people in the hour of need, and afford them deliverance, and bring them to honour, however strange may be the paths through which he leads them. And this consolation have all true Christians; to them the animating assurance belongs, "Fear not, I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.—I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour; I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee!" To which their hearts respond, "O Lord, other lords have had dominion over us; but by thee only will we make mention of thy name!"

The word Zephon has more meanings than one. It indicates concealment; and the Lord was truly, in this case, a God that hid himself. It was hidden from them why he led them by such a strange and irrational way, that even the rational Pharaoh was compelled to exclaim, "They are entangled in the wilderness." It was also hidden from them why they were conducted directly towards the Red Sea, and what would occur to them there. But woe to him to whom God is in every respect a hidden God, who neither knows him as a holy and just God, nor as a kind and gracious Father in Christ!

God, in his divine government, is often a hidden God, and occasionally is so in a very high degree. Think of the history of Lazarus. How inexplicable to his sisters must have been his death, although Jesus had sent to tell them that his sickness was not unto death, but only that the Son of God might be glorified. Think of the death of Christ himself. What thoughts—yea, what amazement must it have caused his dis-

ciples, who expected any other result sooner than this! How much it seemed opposed to the word of God, at least as far as they understood it, which was nevertheless precisely fulfilled by it!

But David says also, respecting the people of God, "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man, thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." (Psalm xxxi. 20.) And the christian church, in all ages, has stood in need of this protection, as much as Israel at that time, although it has not at all times perceptibly manifested itself. When the good work is really begun in an individual, to what dangers is it exposed! so that, humanly speaking, nothing seems easier than a falling from grace. The temptations of the world are perhaps the most inconsiderable. But as if we had not enemies enough in the corruptions and impurities of our own hearts, Satan himself resists us, whose most painful attacks are perhaps the least dangerous. But who can expect to escape his assaults, since he attacked even Christ himself? and if Paul was exposed to his buffetings, what may not happen to us? Do not we require a Baalzephon, a Lord who conceals and preserves? Yes, more than can be expressed. Have we not seen even a David fall, a Solomon err so far as to bow the knee to idols, and a Moses infringe upon the honour of God? How humble ought therefore to be our walk, and how ought we to watch and pray, lest we fall into temptation!

Zephon also signifies something which is regarded with desire, and the word Migdol, a tower, as also something excellent. A people therefore are here pointed out, who ardently desire something excellent,

and look out for it; and this state of mind is only found in true Christians. Every one else longs for things which only deserve to be termed excellent in a very limited sense, being merely of an earthly nature. Days of ease, health, long life, prosperity, and possessions, are the highest summit of the worldling's wishes. But true Christians are otherwise minded; for though they do not despise these things, yet they by no means cleave to them. The new heart and right spirit, for which David prays, the righteousness which avails before God, and the peace of God arising from it, which passeth all understanding, the Holy Spirit and eternal life, fellowship with God, and intimate union with Christ, are the excellencies of Migdol, for which they pant. They choose the good part, and look towards it with desire. With longing eyes they watch for the fulfilment of the glorious promises of God, both with respect to themselves, the church and the world; as regards the former, they long for the period of a more perfect subjection, crucifixion, and destruction of their carnal nature, and of a wider expansion of their hearts in faith and love, of a more intimate fellowship with Christ, and their final reception into eternal glory. And their language is, "we lift up our eyes to the hills, from whence cometh our help." "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" How manifold is the strife, how various the labours of the present state! Days of rain and tempest often follow a little sunshine. And how many groan beneath the cross, who like Simon of Cyrene, were hastening home to refresh themselves after the labours of the field! Such is also the case in the journies of the Israelites. First one thing is wanting, and then another, and still

they are dwelling in a wilderness and not in Canaan, their destination. And if the precious fruits of the promised land are shown them, unbelief whispers that they will never reach it, and Joshua has enough to do to cheer the spirits of the people, who all lift up their voices and weep.

Finally, Zephon also signifies the north. "The north and the south—thou hast created them," says Ethan, in Psalm lxxxix. 12. Towards the north there are a few stars, which scarcely change their place in the heavens the whole year through, and one of them is termed the polar-star, from remaining almost immoveable. This star often guided the traveller, both by sea and land, before the invention of the compass; and thus the children of Israel, though they needed no polar-star, yet they were in want of a firm point, on which the eye of their confidence might be fixed. This they could not find on earth, especially under their existing circumstances, but were compelled to seek it on high, to which the lofty tower seemed to point. For what provision had they made for their journey? They were devoid even of weapons, not to mention any thing else.

Not only they, however, but we all require a polar-star, an immutable object, to which our souls may cleave. But where is it to be found? Not in the world—not in its wisdom, which is foolishness in the sight of God, and varies every five years, and is therefore no fixed, no polar-star. Not in its favour or its possessions, which are as mutable as every thing else. Equally destitute are we in ourselves in a firm ground of confidence. On what therefore shall we lean, since the Scripture declares him to be a fool who trusts to his

own understanding; and since that which is really valuable is revealed only unto babes? On our own might? we cannot even make a hair white or black. On our resolutions? they are, when born, already like infants half dead. On our courage? which so easily fails us. On our light? which is so soon obscured. On our certainty? which is so soon shaken. On our faith? which so readily vacillates. On our experience? which we so rapidly forget; or on what else shall we lean, since man at his best estate is altogether vanity, and since a malediction rests upon him that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm?

Who then shall be our stay, our firm dependance? Shall God? But are we not sinners, and is he not an enemy to sin? A star, however, is risen in Jacob, and a rod out of Judah's root; to it shall the Gentiles seek. In him is life and all abundance. Let us look unto Jesus. We need wisdom, great wisdom; we must be in possession of a virtue which shall be valid in the sight of God; without holiness no one shall see him, and we require a great deliverance from the multitude of evils that oppress us. But see! all this is found in One—in Jesus Christ; and even, as in the Israelitish camp, almost every eye was directed to his type, the brazen serpent, so ought we to desire to know nothing but Christ and him crucified. Then, though possessing nothing in ourselves of which we can boast, or whereon we can depend, yet we have him in whom all is comprised; and though our faith may be but weak, he can easily strengthen it; and if we believe not, yet he remains faithful. This is the true polar star for us poor pilgrims. His word is the tower Migdol, which points us to him; and this word we must hold fast.

The children of Israel were very soon placed in circumstances, in which they had great need of this firm point beyond the sphere of the visible world. We also occasionally think that we are in a very distressing and perplexing situation. Perhaps this may be the case. But when it will appear to us, as if no one besides ourselves had been in similar, or even still more distressing circumstances, and when we are inclined to exclaim, with Jeremiah, "Where is there a sorrow like unto my sorrow!" we are under a mistake. Let us for a moment picture to ourselves the situation of the Israelites at Pihahiroth. They were encamped in a deep dell, surrounded by mountains, from which it was impossible to escape, either to the right or left. There was only one entrance to this vale. The opposite end was closed by the Arabian Gulph, or the Red Sea. And into this hollow way the children of Israel were obliged to enter, because the cloudy pillar led them thither. Pharaoh ascertained their position. He began to repent having suffered them to remove, by which the country had endured an irreparable loss, in being thus deprived of its bond-servants, who performed the labour which they had no desire to do. His counsellors agreed with him perfectly, and the resolution was speedily taken. He immediately commanded his army to march, and placed himself as generalissimo at its head. So little time was lost, that the children of Israel were soon overtaken. These good people thought of no danger, but believed they had left all distress behind them in Egypt. They had no weapons wherewith to defend themselves, and they were not

less deficient in courage. The provisions they had brought with them out of Egypt were almost consumed, and they began to be in want. All at once they saw behind them the mighty Egyptian host, with its glittering weapons, rattling carriages, and stamping horses. Who can describe their terror! Pharaoh, to all appearance, could now do with them as he pleased; could slay their chiefs, cause them to perish with hunger, chase them into the sea, or drive them back into a more severe bondage than before. The Israelites saw no means of escape; pent up on each side by craggy rocks, before them the sea, behind them a martial host. Dreadful situation! they were either irrecoverably lost, or, if any alternative was left, it was the only one of surrendering at discretion, and what would then become of them? Their terror was indescribable. They began to cry aloud most piteously. Nothing was left them but Baalzephon, i. e. the pole-star in the heavens, which shines the brightest in the darkest night—nothing but Migdol, the high and lofty—nothing but the Lord, to whom they directed their cries; not, however, in a believing and confident manner, but more fearing than hoping—hoping where they had apparently nothing to hope for. They had forgotten all the great and astonishing things which the Lord had already done for them, and were incapable of inferring from thence that he would not now abandon them. Even Moses, to whom this was nothing unexpected, since the Lord had already informed him of it, even he stood awhile mute and astonished. Nay, how far may not mistrust be carried! The children of Israel, in their apprehensions, conceived

a horrible suspicion, even with regard to Moses, that he had, perhaps, thus concerted it with Pharaoh; at least, they considered him as the author of the whole calamity, in having brought them, by his thoughtlessness, into this desperate situation, which they had foreseen, and had more than once said to him, "Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians." For, however wretched that servitude might be, yet it would have been better for us than to perish thus miserably in the desert.

Nor can it be described what distress and anxiety the law causes a soul in which it performs its office, causing it to exclaim with Paul, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" The individual then sees no way of escape, and in such circumstances many have probably said, with the children of Israel, 'O that we had only remained in Egypt! O that we had only remained in our former state of security, in which we did not trouble ourselves about God and his word, about our souls and their state, but lived without care like others!'

In short, the poor Israelites imagined nothing less than that every thing had conspired for their destruction—Moses and Pharaoh, the valley and the sea. Certainly they had much that might have encouraged the visible sign of the gracious presence of God, in the pillar of cloud and of fire; but what availed that in such a season of distress? O how different were their feelings now, to what they experienced at Rameses, where they shouted for joy, whilst now they groan with apprehension! Night surrounds them; the pole-star alone shines upon them. Nothing

is left them but him whose name is *I am* ; and he will continue to be that which his name imports. Fear not, therefore, the Lord will get glory to himself. He will fight for you, whilst ye shall stand still and see his salvation.

V.

THE PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

NUMB. xxxiii. 8.

“And they departed from before Pihahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness.”

WE left the children of Israel in the most critical situation. Three enemies surrounded them at the same time; and it was difficult to say which of them was the most cruel—Pharaoh, the sea, or the inaccessible rocks. If they opened their mouths wide in exultation at Hahiroth, they now opened them only to give vent to the oppression of their hearts. Even Moses was silent, although his heart cried the more loudly and piercingly to God. We will now consider the narrative, together with its signification, a little more closely.

Moses had been silent a short time, but only for the purpose of praying, that he might then open his mouth the more effectually. “Fear ye not,” said he, “stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you to-day.” Remarkable words, which received their complete fulfilment on Calvary; but yet it is always thus in the experience of the Christian;

and what peace may not he enjoy, who by faith lays hold of the words, "The Lord will fight for you, and has fought for you!" But it required great firmness to have the mind at ease under such circumstances. There was nothing particular in maintaining their present position; for to this they were compelled by dire necessity, and the impossibility of flight; for whither should they flee? The way upwards, towards heaven, alone stood open to them; every other outlet was closed. And thus we must necessarily be cooped up on every side, in order to hope solely in God. For as long as nature sees an outlet, she seeks to escape by it. As long as she thinks she has still any righteousness or strength of her own, she does not wholly receive Christ. Hence it is that we generally despond so pitiably, when nothing is left us but God. The firmness of the children of Israel consisted in an immutable confidence reposed exclusively in God, instead of any visible support, without which their hearts would have trembled like the aspen-leaf.

The Lord now majestically interposed, by saying to Moses, "Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Wherefore criest thou unto me? There is no need of it. Do thou also stand still, and leave me to act; supplication is not necessary to induce me to help. I am ready; tell them to go forward. What a command! Whither shall they go? To the Red Sea, for the purpose of perceiving the full extent of their extremity and their helplessness? For this reason also, amongst others; we always seek to escape from such a sight, and are satisfied with a slight view of our wretchedness, even as the sight of the sea must have

been discouraging and appalling to the Israelites. "Speak unto them, that they go forward." When such is the command we must obey, in order to see what a troubled sea we ungodly are, that cannot rest. "Speak unto them, that they go forward." They must give heed to nothing, but say in faith, "In all these things we are more than conquerors!" There lies in this command something majestic and inexpressible. God acts just as if there were no hindrance, nor is there any for him; consequently none in reality for his people. Forwards in faith, in spite of every obstacle!

To Moses, the Lord said, "But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it; and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea." How astonishing the command, to divide the sea, and what a man was Moses, not to say, 'Lord, I cannot!' but to think, I am able to do it, because the Lord commands me. It is also much more becoming the believer to say, 'I can,' than 'I am not able.' Yet both belong together, as unable of themselves to do any thing, but able through him to do all things.

Divide the sea! What great deeds may not poor Christians perform, when the Lord calls them to it! Such confidence they ought reasonably to have in God; for their own ability is out of the question. If it had depended solely upon Moses's own ability, the sea would have remained undivided. But he did not take that into account; he did it all in faith, which had for it an express command of God. How irrational is it, therefore, when we bring forward the slightest objection to any command, however great—since it merely de-

pend upon how we apprehend it—whether in the sense of the covenant of works or of grace ; how irrational to oppose our weakness to it, or even in the requirement to perceive an encroachment upon our justification ! The requirements and admonitions in the Scriptures are equally calculated to refresh our spirits, as the promises themselves. It depends only on the hearing ear, and the seeing eye, of both which the Lord is the maker. Therefore bring hither your commands, even though it should be said, “ Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect,” or “ Divide the sea !” Whilst people subtly attempt to explain how the Lord ascribes that to man which he himself performs, or how far the individual participates in the work which God accomplishes by his means—we will in the mean time learn to believe, and to faith, add virtue.

But how was Moses to cause the children of Israel to walk dryshod through the midst of the sea ? This he would never have guessed. But God, in commanding him to divide the sea, told him how he was to do it. He was to lift up his rod, and stretch out his hand over the sea. Let no one despise the means when they are of divine institution. The lifting up of the staff, and the stretching out of the hand, contributed nothing towards dividing the sea ; and yet was so indispensably necessary, that, without this, it would not have been divided. God needed not the wretched instrumentality of a wooden staff, and the weak hand of an octogenarian ; and yet he would do nothing without it. He might have chosen other means, but selected this, and Moses would not have acted piously, but impiously—not believingly, but rebelliously—not

humbly, but self-sufficiently, had he said, ‘I will not lift up my staff, because the Lord does it all alone and of himself.’ In natural things God does not require bread and wine for the support of our lives; nor does he need to send rain upon a country to render it fruitful—even as it never rains in Egypt. In spiritual things, he needs neither church nor preacher—no, nor even Bible nor sacrament for the purpose of converting, instructing, strengthening, and gladdening men’s hearts. But how irrational would he act who should despise either the one or the other, seeing God has appointed both! Even as Moses’s hand and rod were requisite in order to divide the sea—so churches and preachers, Bibles and sacraments, are necessary for the conversion, instruction, and edification of mankind. We therefore gladly and obediently make use of the means, without resting in them, or expecting from them that which comes merely from the Lord, but which it is his will to give through means, however weak and imperfect these means may be. “We forsake not the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but admonish one another.”

The Lord said further unto Moses, “I will harden the heart of the Egyptians, that they shall follow after you, and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh and upon all his host, that the Egyptians may know that I am the Lord.” (Exod. xiv. 4.) Obediently and believingly, without listening to reason or its suggestions, Moses stretched out his hand and rod over the mighty sea. It rolled back reverentially, and divided itself, though not all at once, but gradually, during the whole night. The Lord assisted also with a strong east wind, respecting which Moses subsequently sang, without men-

tioning the stretching forth of his own hand and rod; "With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, and the floods stood upright as in a heap." How easy is it for the Lord to help, and by what mean and apparently trifling instruments, if he chooses to work by means! The children of Israel were in the most dreadful perplexity, shut in on every side—without any prospect of escape; and yet how soon a way was opened for them! "The Lord is a man of war; the Lord is his name!" (Exod. xv. 3.)

But there was something in addition to this unexpected aid. God intended not only to deliver the children of Israel, but also to destroy Pharaoh and his host. He therefore hardened his heart, that he might decide upon following after Israel; "for even for this purpose have I raised him up," said the Lord concerning him, "that I might manifest my power in him, and that my name might be great on the whole earth." He was not, however, permitted to pursue them too soon, but leave them time to be first considerably in advance. "Then the angel of the Lord, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them, and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them." (Exod. xiv. 19.) The angel of the Lord here mentioned, as the one who went before Israel, is frequently alluded to in the book of Genesis. He is no created angel or messenger, but one of the three divine persons; hence it is said, in the 24th verse, "The Lord looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud." This angel appeared unto Moses in the burning bush, and called himself "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob." He it was who wrestled with the

patriarch Jacob, and he calls him both angel and God. This is the angel of the presence, the angel of the covenant, the mediator between God and man, the Son of God, who, in the fulness of time, became man, and is called Jesus Christ. It was he who gave the law on Mount Sinai, as Stephen informs us in his speech to the Jewish council, (Acts vii. 38,) whom he expressly calls God, and again distinguishes from God, when he says, in verse 35, "God sent Moses by the hand of the angel, which appeared to him in the bush"—from whence it is clear that the doctrine of the Trinity is contained in the Old as well as in the New Testament.* Hence Pharaoh and all those who set themselves against the church of Jesus Christ, individually or collectively, have not merely to do with them, as they suppose, but with the Son of God himself, who is able to protect them, whether it be the devil, the world, or their corrupt natures that persecute them.

The children of Israel might have been greatly perplexed on no longer seeing the fiery and cloudy pillar. But it was to their advantage that it left their front, and took up its position behind them, because it was more needful there. The heart of the believer is also terrified when Christ conceals himself from him. But whenever this is the case, it is useful to him—more so than if it were otherwise. Whether we always perceive this or not, is another question.

The fiery and cloudy pillar prevented Pharaoh, the whole night, from overtaking the Israelites, who availed themselves of it, and passed through the midst of the

* Especially from that passage in Isaiah where the Messiah is introduced as saying, "The Lord God and his Spirit hath sent me." (Chap. xlvii. 16.)

sea. It was a dark cloud, it is said, causing obscurity to the Egyptians, and rendered the night still darker to them, whilst to the Israelites it shone brightly, so that sufficient light was afforded them.

Thus it is in spiritual things. There is a kingdom of light and a kingdom of darkness—a kingdom of truth and a kingdom of deceit and lies; there are also children of the light and children of the world and of darkness. Whilst the Lord enlightens the new man, the old becomes so much the more obscure, or manifests himself as such. The same gospel, which seems a clear light to some, appears to others darkness and folly; and even as it is to some a savour of life unto life—so to others it is a savour of death unto death. “For judgment did Christ come into this world, that they that see might become blind, and that the blind might receive their sight.” He is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel. The paths of the Lord are true; the just walk therein, but the transgressors stumble in them. Whilst one of a family is converted, the rest often become more hardened and embittered than before.

Meanwhile, a path had opened itself through the midst of the sea. It stood up on both sides like crystal walls, which wondrously reflected the light of the fiery pillar. The east wind, which blew in the midst, dried the way so rapidly, that not a single foot was wet in going over. But who does not wonder at the courage of those who first ventured to enter? Paul admires it, when in Heb. xi. 29, he says, “By *faith* they passed through the Red Sea as on dry land;” and therefore reckons it amongst the mighty acts which he there recounts. Unbelief might have supposed, ‘What

would be the result, if these liquid walls should flow together again! I see no dam to restrain this immense mass of waters.' But faith regarded neither the hand of Moses, nor the enormous heap of waters, nor their unnatural position; it looked to the omnipotent hand of God, who created that sea out of nothing, and made of it what he pleased. If nothing obeyed him when he said, "Let there be light," how should not something—how should not the sea prove obedient to his behest, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further." And is not faith, on the whole, a venture? Blessed are they who do not see, and yet believe! Peter risked still more. He walked, not through, but upon the sea. Moses endured, as seeing him that is invisible. Who does not prefer riches to poverty—independence to dependency; and who would not willingly gather manna for a longer period, instead of seeking it every morning? But it is the nature of faith to seek its righteousness and strength in the Lord, and to have in itself only as much as the Lamb of God pours into our earthly vessels.

The Egyptians ventured also, and entered upon this wondrous way, into which they were led, in order to destroy them there, all at once. They went forward—not in faith, for they knew it not; but in presumption. The children of Israel went into the sea about six o'clock in the evening, at sunset, and reached the opposite shore about four in the morning; so that they required about ten hours, in order to pass through it, in which they doubtless did not delay, but made all possible haste. Towards the morning, Pharaoh observed the movement in the Israelitish camp. He hastily set out with his army in pursuit of them to overtake them. In the

thick darkness in which he was enveloped by the cloudy pillar, he saw neither heaven nor earth, and directed his course according to the noise of the Israelites on their march. Thus, before he was aware, he found himself in the midst of the sea, which still stood like liquid walls. The Lord now looked from the fiery and cloudy pillar upon the Egyptians, spread terror through all the host, and loosened the wheels of the chariots. They began to comprehend that the Lord himself was fighting for Israel, and wished to return. But God now commanded Moses to stretch out his hand again over the sea. He did so; and as this act had previously divided the sea—so now it caused it to flow together again. The crystal walls gave way, and overwhelmed the whole Egyptian host, so that not one escaped to tell the fate of the rest. Still the report of it spread itself through the whole of Canaan, the inhabitants of which called to mind this remarkable event, even forty years afterwards, and were terrified beforehand, on that account, when hearing of the approach of the children of Israel, as Rahab related to the spies. (Josh. ii.) Even ancient writers mention a tradition, that the Red Sea had once divided itself into two parts, and that the dry land had become visible.

Thus the Lord gave a great and striking proof how he is able to deliver his church and his children out of the greatest distress, by the most wonderful and the smallest, as well as the greatest means, and also how able he is to overthrow his enemies; so that the former have no need to despond in any distress, but receive the exhortation, “Cast not away your confidence.” It not unfrequently comes to such a point, that there remains no human prospect of rescue, and all natural

means appear insufficient, and that God alone is able to help. But however unwillingly nature sees itself brought to this point—grace has no reason to shun it; for a breaker has gone up to prepare the way. And as certain as it is, that the true Christian shall at length be delivered out of all his distresses—so certain it is also, that all the wicked shall eventually perish, although they may stand as firm as a palace, and present as fair an appearance as a fruitful field. The Lord's people are happier in the extremity of necessity, than the ungodly in the height of prosperity; for a change will certainly take place with both.

Every difficulty was not immediately removed in the case of the children of Israel; but from one trouble they fell into another, probably still greater; yet they also experienced one deliverance after another. After having happily escaped from Egypt, they seemed justified in believing, that they would enter into the promised land without further obstruction; and the appearance of the fiery and cloudy pillar at Etham seemed fully to justify this expectation. But some days later, the Red Sea presented itself in their way, like a ravenous lion. Such is also the case with the Christian; so that cause is given him to ask with Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why do these things befall us?" or even to the mistrust of the Israelites, when they said to Moses, "Thou hast brought us into this desert only to slay us." The way led them once near to the borders of Canaan; but they were obliged to turn back, as if they were returning to Egypt—back to the Red Sea, probably directly across the track they had already made. And is it not true, that the Christian on his pilgrimage has frequently shouted victory, and be-

lieved that henceforth his path would be more straight and even; and yet found it the reverse? Yet nevertheless, happy is the people whose God is the Lord. Although his name is "Wonderful," yet he is also called "the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace."

That the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea has a higher and a spiritual signification, is evident from 1 Cor. x. 1, where the apostle says, "I would not that ye should be ignorant, brethren, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Their passage was therefore like a baptism, and prefigured the baptism of the New Testament, even as both point out and seal all that belongs to the purifying from sin, and that which produces and promotes it.

Let us, first of all, cast another look at the Israelites, traversing the bed of the sea. They walk there as in an awful sepulchre. Think of the horrible depths of the sea, and imagine the immense height of the watery walls on both sides, threatening to overwhelm, and yet standing firmly. Nor do I suppose that the sea immediately divided itself from one end to the other; but since it is said, that the waters went back the whole night through, I infer that they still stood like walls or ramparts before them, which they continually divided in faith, so that they departed on each side on their nearer approach. Above them was a wide-extending cloud. And thus they were shut in on all sides by water. This might justly be called

a baptism, which formerly took place by the entire immersion of the body in water. The Jews were therefore already baptized in their fathers, and when Jesus commanded that they should be baptized as well as the heathens, it proved the insufficiency of the first baptism, as also of the first birth; thus John also declared his baptism to be insufficient, and that it was necessary to be baptized with fire and the Holy Ghost, by him who should come after him, although he was before him.

Respecting baptism it is said, that we are baptized into Christ, and particularly into his death, and that as we are buried with him by baptism into his death, so we are washed and cleansed by his blood and Spirit from our sins. Is it not remarkable, therefore, that the sea is called the *Red Sea*, from its red colour or shore?

It is also observable, that the sea was rent like the veil of the temple, into two parts, and thus a way was made where previously none had existed; for was not the humanity of Christ also divided into two parts by death, when soul and body were separated, by which the way to the throne of grace, otherwise inaccessible to us, became a new and living way? All the Egyptians were drowned in the same sea, by which Israel was saved. Thus by Christ's sufferings and death, life has been procured for all believers, as well as the perdition of all their foes.

Hence the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea, is a representation of that which belongs to purification from sin. Here, several things are to be observed.

1. Israel leaves Egypt for the purpose of proceeding

to Canaan, the promised land. A figure of an awakened soul, drawn to God, which takes the firm and noble resolution to renounce all sin, and serve God, seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

2. The fiery and cloudy pillar is the secret but powerful attraction of the Father to the Son, which the soul follows, and by which it is faithfully and correctly guided. Here the individual is brought to the salutary means of grace, or they to him, in such a manner, that he is afterwards obliged to confess, that if a single, and often inconsiderable, circumstance of his life had been otherwise, his whole course would have assumed another form.

3. The pursuing Pharaoh, as we have already seen, is a figure of the law in its strict and insatiate requirements, as well as of Satan and the powers of darkness. The latter soon perceives when any one is desirous of escaping from him, and consequently opposes him in every way. Some he torments with blasphemous, others with unbelieving thoughts, as if they were undertaking something they could never accomplish, either because it was already too late, or because they were too great sinners; presenting at the same time some particular sin before them, or even trying to persuade them that they had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost. Others he torments with doubts of the truth of God's word, nay, even whether there be a God, a Christ, a devil, and eternal life, so that the individual appears to himself to be indescribably reprobate, and even irrecoverable. Others he plagues with a variety of useless cogitations and difficult speculations and questions, which are entirely

unnecessary to the soul in that state. He also acts the preacher of the law, and makes exaggerated requirements. Or else he carries to an extreme the characteristics by which the individual is to judge of his state of grace.

In this manner the new convert may be brought into a dilemma, similar to that of the children of Israel at Pihahiroth. Numberless are the evil thoughts he suggests to the mind, in order to turn the soul aside from its purpose; and to this is added the power of inbred corruption, which the individual never felt in such a manner as now, when seeking an entire deliverance from it; so that he exclaims with David, "Iniquities prevail against me."

4. The utterly helpless condition of the children of Israel represents the oppressive weakness felt by the awakened soul. He is unwilling to return to Egypt, to the service of sin; and yet cannot proceed further. It fares with him according to the words of Hezekiah, "The children are come to the birth, but there is no power to bring forth." To will is present with him, but how to perform he finds not. O! he no longer excuses himself on the score of weakness, but considers it as great misery, which it also is.

5. But the Red Sea, which threatened destruction to the Israelites, proved of the greatest benefit to them. And this very feeling of sin, misery, and inability, which causes an awakened person so much uneasiness, turns to his greatest advantage. For it serves, like the blindness of the man born blind, and the death of Lazarus, to promote the divine glory, that Christ may be honoured by it. That feeling of wretchedness, which casts down every hope, is just

that which causes it to be said to such a Bartimeus, "Be of good cheer, he calleth thee!"

6. The way by which Israel was delivered, was one which was most miraculously opened; a way apparently dangerous and terrific, and hidden from the Egyptians. This may be also said of the way by which the Lord leads his people to life. For how wonderful is the way of salvation through the birth, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ! The Lord's guidance is also not unfrequently of such a kind, as to appear very dangerous to reason. And what does the natural man know and comprehend of it? Nothing at all! It is foolishness unto him, neither can he know it.

However dreadful the path of the Israelites might seem to them, yet it was an encouragement to them to have with them Moses and Aaron, and the bones of Joseph, who had expressly commanded that they should take them with them, in order that they might be buried in Canaan. So it may also be very cheering to Christians in their afflictions, to see from the Psalms, how the saints have formerly been exercised; but especially how Jesus Christ himself has suffered, and has left us an example that we should follow his steps. And not only so, but that he is ever with his people, especially in distress, to deliver them and honour them.

7. We observe also the stretched-out arm of Moses, and the strong east wind. What was it that once made so many thousands at Jerusalem, from being bitter enemies of Christ, his warmest adorers, ready to suffer death in any form for his sake? Was it Peter's discourse? Was it Paul's eloquence which gathered hosts of them who had formerly been hea-

thens, under the cross of Christ? Was it the sound of the horns which were blown, that threw down Jericho's walls? Ah no! It was the arm of the Lord. But to whom is it revealed? Its vivifying power is manifested in the conversion of every sinner, which can be effected by nothing less; by which also the converted soul is kept unto salvation.

A strong east wind arose, and dried the sea; and a rushing, like the sound of a mighty wind, was the signal to the holy apostles of the approach of the Holy Spirit. When he blows upon man, "all flesh is as grass, and all the goodliness thereof as the flower of the field." He it is that quickens. He is the bright-shining cloud that points out the right path to Israel, and fills them with a cheerful confidence, even when walking through the gloomy vale. He it is that glorifies Jesus Christ, and those that are led by him are the children of God. Whilst "he that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his."

This wind blew from the east; and thus we find Isaiah speaking of a sharp east wind, by which the Lord afflicts his people to take away their sin. And does not our misery and our salvation proceed from the east? There paradise was situated, in which the first man fell. And there also is Bethlehem and Calvary, by which we are restored. There the Sun of Righteousness arose, which sends its quickening beams even to us, and from thence an eternal and cloudless day dawns upon us, if we are children of the light and of the day, and walk in the light, even as he is in the light.

8. The cloud, which overshadowed the people of Israel, protecting them from the pursuing foe, descend-

ing upon them as a refreshing dew, and serving by its radiance instead of a lamp, may be regarded as an emblem of the Redeemer's blissful mediation between God and man. From it drops a refreshing dew upon the troubled heart, and a healing balm for the wounded conscience, yea, a peace of God which passeth understanding. Here the wearied soul finds a shadow from the heat, and a defence from every danger; for the "name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe." Here all the divine attributes manifest themselves in the mildest and gentlest light; and here the never-failing spring of salvation bubbles forth, from which the believer draws water with joy.

Lastly, the divided sea is a type of baptism, and consequently of all that which is requisite to purify the soul from sin. The Red Sea of the Redeemer's blood is the abyss into which the sins of believers are so deeply plunged, that, if sought for, they can never be found; the sea which swallows up, overwhelms, and drowns Satan, with all his host, and the old man, and quickens in us a new man, who after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. This precious blood of Christ, who offered himself to God by the Holy Spirit, is that which alone perfectly cleanses our consciences from dead works, to serve the living God.

Not, indeed, as indispensably necessary as this blood, and the vivifying Spirit inseparably united with it, yet serviceable for the purification from sin, and the mortification of corrupt nature, are the various trials and afflictions, internal as well as external, which are therefore not wanting to the true Christian. Was not

Moses the most tried man upon earth, and did not Jacob exclaim, "All these things are against me?" David thought himself formed for affliction; Asaph's chastisement was renewed every morning; and Paul suffered tribulation on every side. But he represents it as very salutary, when he says, "it worketh patience, experience, and hope;" and that the Father of spirits chastiseth every son whom he receiveth, for his profit, that he may become a partaker of his holiness. Paul adduces it also as a proof of adoption, and that he who is without chastisement is not a son. James therefore wishes believers to count it all joy, when they fall into divers temptations; and Peter affirms, that though they may cause them heaviness, yet faith is thereby tried, and found more precious than gold tried by fire. And who would flee sufferings and chastisements, however painful they might be, if they only contributed to make him meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, if he estimates that inheritance in any measure as it deserves? And are not chastisements succeeded by the most lovely consolations, which religion distributes, of the purest kind, and often in superabundance?

If, in conclusion, we wish to determine the period in which the true Christian experiences a similar event to the passage of the Israëlites through the Red Sea, it is applicable to that season, when, after a long conflict, he perceives the fulness of salvation opened to the penitent sinner in Christ, with a believing appropriation of it to himself in the light of the Holy Spirit.

We also observe the wandering Israelites provided with a few timbrels, and are perhaps inclined to look

upon these as needless and burdensome lumber, which they had done better to leave behind. Perhaps they were also frequently inclined to throw them away. But now, behold Miriam and a choir of females on the opposite bank of the sea, seizing their musical instruments, singing, and dancing. O glorious music, that proclaims the high praises of God ! O delightful strains, that celebrate such a triumph ! O that every one understood how to join in the song ! The blood of Christ alone can enable us to do so ; and he that participates in it here below, after wandering through the vale of repentance, is able even here to sing praises, and will at length receive a harp of God, will strike its strings, which vibrate to the breath of the Lord, and sing the song of Moses and the Lamb !

VI.

THE WATERS OF MARAH.

EXOD. xv. 22—26.

“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah.

“And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

“And he cried unto the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet; then he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them.

“And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the name of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of those diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord that healeth thee.”

WE left the children of Israel on the shores of the Red Sea, rejoicing at the overthrow of their enemies and their own miraculous escape. When beholding the exuberance of their joy, we are ready to say, ‘Ah, ye little know what still awaits you! You have still a

very long and wearisome way before you, and yet you seem to think you are only a few paces from Canaan, or even that you are already there. A rabble has come on shore with you, that will excite many a tumult, and draw down upon you many a severe chastisement, because you suffer yourselves to be seduced by them—an Egyptian mob, which in reality do not belong to you, but which you suffer to accompany you ; and thus act very wrong. Your journey will be directed to Sinai, and whoever has been there, knows what an awful place it is. Your labours are only commencing, though you regard them as terminated.'

However, it is necessary to proceed further, and their next journey is one of three days through the wilderness of *Etham*. (Numb. xxxiii. 3.) This word, as we have already seen, admits of a variety of interpretations, and it may also be rendered "gravelly soil." How difficult is it to walk upon such a surface! Every step is tedious, and the longer we walk on it, the more fatiguing it becomes. In the place of the Egyptians, another enemy appears—not indeed so terrific in appearance, but not less dangerous in reality, and that is, thirst. The desert is devoid of water within a three days' circuit. Have they only escaped from the Egyptian sword to fall a prey to a still more dreadful foe? For what can be more terrible than to die of thirst? At length they arrive at Marah, which signifies bitter ; and there they find water. How must they have rushed towards it, in order to quench their thirst, and drink to the full ! But behold, it is bitter, and just as unfit for drinking as the waters of the sea they had left. Why is this ? we are ready to ask ; is it only to tantalize the poor people ? They murmur against Moses, and ask

him, in a menacing manner, "What shall we drink?" But why do ye murmur against him? Did he place himself at your head, at his own impulse, and had not God difficulty enough to induce him to do so? Have ye learned so little understanding from the mighty wonder of your passage through the sea, as now to act as if there were no God? It is, indeed, said of you, (Exod. xiv. 31,) that you believed the Lord and his servant Moses, on your safe arrival on this side the Red Sea; but how long did this faith last? Not even for three days! Is this persevering and being faithful? Is this going from faith to faith?

They prosecuted their journey therefore through the wilderness of Etham. From this we learn, first, that sincerity of heart always abides with the Christian, and passes like a straight line through his whole life and its manifold vicissitudes. In his inmost soul there is always a serious disgust and repugnance towards all that is sinful, as well as an inclination towards God and all that is good, a mourning and thirsting after God and his fellowship, and a striving against that which obstructs it. This is the case with all true Christians, and is, so to speak, their soul. For where this does not exist, there is no real godliness. This feeling may indeed be suppressed for a season; but still it shows itself again; it may be concealed from the individual, but it always manifests itself anew.

The gravelly soil of Etham is no inappropriate figure of human life and its difficulties in general. Moses is right in affirming it to be but labour and sorrow. He that accumulates earthly riches, knows not who shall gather them. The most tender alliances and connections are torn asunder by death, and if we build

houses and lay out plantations, we know not who shall inherit them. Life's sweetest enjoyments soon pall upon the palate, so that Solomon at length exclaims, "It is all vanity."

The Christian also frequently walks on a gravelly soil. He has his own peculiar sufferings, and has others in common with all Christians. Self-denial, the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts, the daily taking up his cross, the strife of the flesh against the Spirit, the chastisements he has to bear, and all that he has else to suffer, both personally and relatively, form the gravelly soil on which he must also make his three days' journey.

But to the difficulties of the way was also added a painful thirst, and it is indeed wonderful how soon the Lord suffers his people to fall into some new distress, equally as great as the previous one. It seems as if he would accustom them to trust exclusively to him, take no step without him, and never despond nor despair with him. They must never imagine that their distresses are for ever at an end, but be convinced, that there is not one of them out of which the Lord is not able and willing to deliver. And from all this a life of entire dependance on God must develop itself, as well as a wonderful confidence in him—both which are essential parts of true godliness. They must leave him to act, humble themselves, and quietly hope, and patiently wait. It is, indeed, quite requisite that we should experience similar wants to those of the Israelites, in order that our confidence in ourselves may expire, that we may become thoroughly conscious how greatly we need the Lord's continual aid, and that we may learn to hope in his power and faithfulness. Nor

ought it at all to appear strange to us, when, like the children of Israel, we are frequently in want of many things, even of such as are necessary, and see ourselves compelled to cleave to Christ as our only support, that we may hourly receive from him what we require, both for life and for godliness. But all the children of Israel did not participate in the whole of their trials, since many of them died on the way; nor are all believers tried in the same manner or to the same extent, although the cup goes constantly round, and each must take a drink of it.

The children of Israel probably suffered much from thirst during these three days in a hot climate. Doubtless they frequently attempted to find water by digging, but in vain. They were obliged to confess that even water is a precious gift of God, and that our efforts of themselves are ineffectual. Thus the disciples laboured a whole night in fishing, and caught nothing, until, at the Lord's command, they cast their net on the right side of the vessel, and caught an abundance of fish. How often do our own endeavours only serve to convince us chiefly of their own insufficiency!

The Israelites applied to Moses with the question, "What shall we drink?" This was acting correctly; for Moses was the mediator of the old covenant, and Israel had to expect the Lord's help through his hand. They needed to apply to him, even as we to the mediator of the new covenant, Jesus Christ, through whom all divine blessings must flow down upon us. And how much more able is he than Moses was or could be, to relieve all our necessities, however great and urgent they may be, even when we are able to help ourselves

as little as the children of Israel in the wilderness of Etham!

At length they found water. What could have been more desirable? Never was water so precious to them as now, after being so long deprived of it. But alas! it was very bitter. This excited their anger against Moses, and they said, "What shall we drink?" But was Moses any better off than they? Yet thus acts sinful man. He will have every thing according to his own wish and will; otherwise he murmurs. He ought to submit to the will of God; he ought to humble himself; he ought to acknowledge, that on account of his sins, he has no claim upon the smallest of God's mercies. But in opposition to this, he becomes morose and angry both with God and man; and requires that God should order every thing to his mind, without returning him any particular thanks. But where is the renunciation of self-will? Where is the Lord's will, which is alone good, obeyed without reluctance?—nay, where is such a sentiment cherished?

But does it not often fare with mankind, both in natural and spiritual things, as with the children of Israel at Marah? Many suppose, that if they were once released from some particular burden, or had attained some particular object; if they had but a sufficient maintenance or had provided for their children, &c., nothing more remained to be wished for, and they would be quite satisfied. If things do not happen so, they feel themselves justified in complaining; and if their wishes are realized, they find something else to embitter the waters. And why? Because the individual must learn to seek his happiness in God and his

will, but not elsewhere. Become different thyself; and then, though the difficulties of thy situation and thy particular affliction may continue, yet thou wilt greatly gain by it.

So it is also in spiritual things. Persons often wish to experience the feeling of sin, repentance, contrition, and assurance all at once, together with sanctification, and take the kingdom of heaven as if by storm. But they are obliged to retire and wait. They promise themselves unwonted edification and go empty away, whilst others are refreshed and satisfied. And are there not even states in which that becomes bitter to the soul which otherwise afforded it comfort and refreshment?—such as hearing, reading, meditation, conversation, the sacrament, prayer, and the remembrance of the light and comfort previously enjoyed.

The children of Israel travelled three days without stopping; and even in this respect we trace a similarity with the experience of the Christian. But for what purpose is it? Doubtless to exercise the individual in the denial of those things he most desires, that he may learn to submit every thing to the will of God, whether he gives or takes away, whether he visits us with affliction or consolation, or leaves us in barrenness or refreshes us; to exercise us also in not too ardently desiring any thing however good it may be, but submit ourselves to God in that meek and quiet spirit, which is of great price in his sight. In the joy of the children of Israel at the Red Sea, doubtless much that was sensible had intermingled itself, and it was probably carried to excess. Something therefore now occurred to cool it; and thus every thing must be mortified, until we attain to a state of complete resignation.

Marah, generally speaking, represents every thing of a bitter nature; for which, however, the Lord knows a means of sweetening, and of rendering it useful and agreeable. He showed Moses a tree, which he cut down and cast into the water, by which it was rendered fit for use. Travellers assure us, that there is much bitter water in the vicinity of the Red Sea, but no wood is known which is able to render it palatable. We cannot therefore say, whether the tree had a natural power to sweeten, and might still manifest it, if it were known, or whether God did not perform a secret miracle on this occasion. Be that as it may; the gospel points us to a tree which renders every bitter thing sweet. This tree is the cross of Christ, that wondrous tree, which gives life to the world, and on which the greatest wonder took place, so that it retains its sweetening power, in the same undiminished degree, in every age. On this cross our reconciliation was effected, and thereby the bitterness of the wrath of God appeased. Even death is slain by it. Its sting is taken away, and it now only serves to deliver the believer from all bitterness, and to conduct him into all sweetness. By this great wonder, the bitter ocean of our sins and the punishment incurred by them is sweetened; so that they cannot injure us, if we believe in the Son of God.

But we have here also the means of sweetening all bitterness. The bitterness of repentance is sweetened by this consideration, that being a godly sorrow, it worketh a repentance unto life, which no one repenteth of. The bitterness of denying the world and self is sweetened by this, that he who renounces every thing for his sake receives it again a hundred-fold. The bitterness of the spiritual combat is alleviated by this,

that it is the good fight of faith, to which the victory and the crown of glory is held out. The bitterness of the various sufferings we have to endure, is sweetened by the consideration, that they are not worthy of the glory that shall be revealed ; and also of the various temptations by which we are assailed, of which it is said, " Blessed is the man that endureth temptation ; for after he is tried he shall receive the crown of life, which God has promised to them that love him." In short, this wondrous tree can sweeten all the suffering that would be otherwise intolerable.

But still it is necessary that the remedy be shown and pointed out to us by the Holy Spirit ; otherwise we should be in a similar situation to that of the disciples on the sea. For when in danger from the wind and the waves, and when Jesus appeared to them on the sea, they cried out for fear, thinking it was a spirit, and that all was over with them, until the Lord reproved them and said, " fear not ! it is I."

Such is the road to Canaan. Who is inclined to enter upon it ? Let us not be deterred, even by arriving at Marah, after three days journeying in the desert. God will order all things for the best. Therefore let us take courage, and cast in our lot with the people of God, and then good shall come unto us. " Draw us, and we will run after thee !"

VII.

THE FOUNTAINS AND PALM-TREES OF ELIM.

“ I SAT under his shadow, with great delight,” says the bride in the Song of Songs, “ and his fruit was sweet unto my taste.” Except Christ, all appeared wild, harsh, and unsavoury to her. Enjoying him, she can dispense with every thing besides ; without him, nothing can satisfy her. She must again possess him, or she falls sick with love. And what a delicious fruit is peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ!—is joy in God, as a gracious Father! is freedom from an evil conscience, a true heart, the full assurance of faith, that perfect love which casteth out fear, and that confidential intercourse with God, in which spirit converses with spirit! There sat the bride. How different to her former position in darkness and the shadow of death! It is thus that the Lord, from time, to time affords his people their Peniels, and their pleasing encampments, like the children of Israel at Elim.

EXOD. xv. 27.

“ And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and three score and ten palm-trees, and encamped there by the waters.”

The children of Israel had now been a month on their journey, having left Egypt on the 15th day of the first

month, and on the same day in the second month, they arrived at this pleasant encampment. After the occurrences at Marah, they had probably not promised themselves much enjoyment. And yet their expectations are exceeded, and it fares uncommonly well with them. They then probably felt assured it would be increasingly better with them at every station. They imagined they had now become acquainted with God, and seen his deliverances in the extremity of distress. They had seen how he is able to help, when none else can advise; and therefore why should the same thing always occur? Yet afterwards, contrary to their expectation, they were again placed in trying circumstances. But why is this? Ought we not to expect any thing? leave the Lord entirely to act as he pleases? resign ourselves unreservedly to him, and expect no change either in good or evil days? It would really seem as if such ought to be the case.

They arrive, therefore, at their fifth encampment, called Elim. The word is of the plural kind, and signifies the strong, the heroic, the courageous. Hence also, El is one of the divine names, and is applied, especially by Isaiah, ch. ix., to the wondrous child, who is there called EL GIBBOR, "the mighty God."

The word Elim also reminds us of rams, who are a figure of strength, which they possess particularly in the head, and of deer, which probably resorted to this shady, pleasant, and well watered spot. This place is described, both by ancient and modern writers, as extremely agreeable, and its beauty is doubtless much increased by its lying in the midst of an immense and unfruitful desert, as if it had been miraculously placed

there, as a proof of the divine Omnipotence, which can form a garden in the midst of such a desert. In recent times, an English traveller found there nine clear fountains of water, but the other three had been sanded up. There were several thousands of palm-trees. Thus their number had either increased, or else Moses only mentions seventy of the chief of them, without intending to say there were no more.

Palm-trees belong to the most remarkable productions of the vegetable kingdom in the east, and they are often mentioned in Scripture. There it is said of the righteous, in the 92d Psalm, that they shall grow as the palm-tree. It is a tree which yields a refreshing and pleasing fruit, called dates. This fruit ripens in every season of the year, which peculiarity it has in common with various other fruit-trees. How must the children of Israel have been refreshed by this fruit! It never casts its foliage like other trees, but in every season is as green as it is fruitful. Its leaves are also of considerable size and umbrageous appearance—a pleasing feast for the eyes of the Israelites, who had long seen nothing but naked rocks, sand, and gravel. They grow perpendicularly to a great height, but are also easy to climb, from the crevices in their rind, which form a kind of ladder. They attain a great age, and when cut down, the roots shoot up again. It is also observed of the palm-tree, that the more it is restrained, the higher it towers. Its branches serve as tokens of joy and victory; hence the church triumphant in heaven, is represented in Rev. vii., with palms in their hands. In the temple itself, a palm-tree and a cherub were placed alternately. And of these beautiful trees

there was a great number at Elim. It was good to be there, and a place in which the traveller willingly pitched his tent.

The resemblance between the palm-tree and the Christian will be easily perceived by the devout reader.

This encampment serves as a proof, that real religion has not only its sorrows, but also its joys; that it calls upon us not merely to self-denial, patience, and the taking up of our cross, but that it also affords us enjoyments, which are not found in the same degree and purity elsewhere. Sighing and sorrow must occasionally flee away, and joy and delight possess the believer. Hence the latter frequently encourages himself in his sufferings, with the certainty of succeeding enjoyments; and he exclaims with David, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul! and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

There is also a difference observable in the Christian's joy. It is indeed his duty to rejoice—yea, to rejoice evermore. In fact, a very agreeable duty, but to the exercise of which a variety of things are requisite, which are exercised by believers in very different degrees. There are certainly those amongst them, who are led as on a plain path, whose outward and inward position, disposition, and constitution, as well as the grace which dwells within them, together with their relative situation, co-operate to enable them to proceed on their way in great equanimity of mind. They are as remote from particular sufferings, as they are from extraordinary feelings of joy, and keep the desirable medium. Again, there are others, who are seldom truly joyful, and that only for a short time, and with respect to whom every

thing is as unfavourable as it is favourable for those first mentioned. Sorrow is their usual element, and sighing and complaining their most frequent employment. They mourn sore like doves, and are as the solitary sparrow on the house-top. They are not like the upright and fruitful palm-tree, but flourish only as the grass, and are like the broken reed or the smoking flax. These are the desponding souls, which must be energetically commanded to be of good courage. Every harsh and severe word makes them tremble, and even comfort must be administered to them in a very gentle manner, lest their distress should be heightened.

There are also anxious and contracted souls, which are often as great a torment to others as to themselves, and with whom it is requisite to have great patience, because they frequently criticise others, and are self-willed. Trifles are often regarded by them as things of great importance, and they are like those people who say, "Touch not, taste not;" whilst in more important things, they are not unfrequently too indulgent, and stand in singular contradiction with themselves.

There are also those who experience very rapid transitions from joy to sorrow, and *vice versa*, as if they were suddenly removed from the severity of winter into the smiles of spring, and then back again into the rudest season of the year. The cross of Christ appears at one time to them in the complete effulgence of the Holy Spirit's light. They drink their fill from the crystal stream that proceeds from it. They have a most heart-cheering view of the putting away of sin, and the purging of iniquity by the blood of Christ, and how, by his one offering, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. They

stand with Moses on Mount Nebo, and enjoy the prospect of Canaan. No breath of doubt moves a single leaf, no zephyr curls the smooth and glassy surface of their even minds, in which the sun of grace reflects itself in all its brilliancy; no impure lust troubles the transparent element, and the balmy perfume of heavenly devotion calmly and gently ascends. But, ere long, the scene on the lake of Gennesaret is renewed. The master lies down to sleep. Hostile winds disturb the lake. Its raging billows fill the yielding bark, and, to all appearances, the first thing they sweep away is faith; at least nothing is heard but the alarming cry of "Master, Master, we perish!" which sounds more like the groan of despair, than the anxious cry of a struggling and supplicating faith; so that the Master even asks, "Where is your faith?"

But how rare are those who, as James says, look into the perfect law of liberty, so as to continue therein; who are firmly established on immutable principles, and who stand like a rock amidst the raging billows! Certainly none but God can thus establish us. But it is nothing impossible, and may be experienced through grace; so that the individual can really say with Paul, in a permanent manner, "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Cor. xii. 10) And these are the characters to whom it may be said, "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy one of Israel in the midst of thee!" (Isaiah xii. 6.)

The joys of the true Christian have all one *origin*, the merits of Christ, especially his grief and tears, his

agony and abandonment, by which he has purchased for his people the ability to rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Even as he condescended to become poor, that we through his poverty might be made rich, so although he might have continued in divine felicity, yet he resigned himself to the deepest sorrow, that we through his grief might have joy. He has accomplished a perfect atonement, and therefore no one need wonder that his people daily and heartily rejoice in it.

The joys of the Christian proceed from one and the same *source*. It is not worldly, earthly, or even sinful things, which constitute his joy, or produce it. It is the Holy Spirit who makes him glad. His rejoicing is therefore entirely independent of outward things. Bodily sufferings, imprisonments, and even tortures, cannot prevent the Holy Spirit from visiting the heart of the Christian. So that the righteous are confident, even in the midst of death, and can sing hymns of praise when lying in fetters. Hence it is a joy of which no man can deprive them, and which Christ calls *his* joy in them. On this account the world does not understand their joyfulness, because it knows not and has not the Holy Spirit.

The joys of the Christian are excited by a variety of *occasions*. At one time it extends itself in such a manner, that the beauties of nature, the divine blessing on the fields and gardens, the advantages of situation, deliverance from some temporal evil, &c. excite the heart to holy joy. At another time it is a book, a sermon, a verse of a hymn, a text, a conversation, which yields such pleasing light, that the soul again strikes the chords of its harp, which it had previously

hung upon the willows. The Lord's Supper, the realizing of the love of God, the atonement of Christ, the consideration of the Lord's wondrous dealings, can often cheer the mind uncommonly. Whilst at another time all is barren and dry, as a proof that the soul cannot produce it alone; but the Spirit that quickeneth.

These joys produce in all the same *effect*. "The joy of the Lord is your strength," says Nehemiah. "When thou enlargest my heart," says David, "I will run in the way of thy commandments." When the Galatians experienced the joys of salvation, they were willing to have plucked out their very eyes. The Hebrews took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and the apostles, after being scourged, departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus.

How desirable is it, therefore, that we meet from time to time with such Elims; and who does not gladly concede repose to the children of Israel, after their three days' tedious journey over the hot and gravelly soil, without being able to take any regular rest during the night? However, they were not permitted to stay long there. For that was not their rest.

Elim, as mentioned before, implies the strong. But to whom is the term applicable? to the place of encampment, or to the Israelitish host? Why not especially to the latter? For Israel is certainly strong. Did he not derive his name from having prevailed, when wrestling with God? How should he not be strong, since the Lord is his strength, on whom he waits, and thus continually renews his strength. Who will over-

come him, since the Lord fighteth for him; how should he not overcome, since the Lord is his sword? "All things are possible to him that believeth." Were this not the case, "if the Lord had not been on our side," now may Israel say, "if the Lord had not been on our side, when men rose up against us; then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us; then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul." (Psalm cxxiv. 1—4.) But now there is a stream which makes glad the city of God; "for God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved." (Psalm xlv. 5, 6.) Christians are strong, and able to perform exploits.

The springs of water were twelve in number, and the palm-trees seventy. The number of the former agrees with that of the apostles, and of the latter with that of the seventy disciples, whom Jesus (according to Luke x.) sent out after them. Now, even as every thing befel the children of Israel typically, so this likewise. Their fifth encampment, therefore, is a type of the Gospel, which was first preached by the twelve apostles and the seventy disciples. This gospel serves as a well watered, shady, and pleasant grove, for the weary and heavy-laden soul, which has fatigued itself on the gravelly soil of Etham, and suffered from the want of every thing. Here it is said to them, "Eat, O friends, and drink, yea, drink abundantly, O beloved!" Here the scorching heat of the sun no longer falls upon them. The glory of the divine majesty no longer darts upon them with fiery ray, so as to cause them to exclaim, "Woe is me, for I am undone;" for "their transgressions are forgiven and their sin is covered."

Even as the palm-branch is a type of victory and peace, and the purling streams by their pleasing murmurs delight and tranquillize, whilst here and there the fleet roebuck or the majestic stag, drinks or grazes on the verdant pastures, so, under the victorious palms of the crucified and risen Saviour, a balmy peace distils upon the soul, the timid deer are attracted near, the hart, that had long panted for the water-brooks, drinks, and all that the soul perceives, proves at the same time refreshing. In short, the delight afforded by this grove of palms to the Israelites, after such a wearisome journey, is experienced incomparably more essentially in the gospel, as soon as a humbled soul learns to understand it in the light of the Holy Spirit.

But all this does not constitute Canaan, although it may be a small foretaste, and a faint reflection of it. What must Canaan itself be, where the crystal stream, planted on both sides with trees, which bear twelve manner of fruits, rolls along where no vicissitude is experienced, but such as exalts the felicity of its inhabitants! Yea, what no eye hath seen, nor ear heard, has God prepared for them that love him.

Let us also become travellers. Let us forsake Egypt with all its splendour, and hasten towards Canaan.

VIII.

THE RED SEA.

NUMB. xxxiii. 10.

“And they removed from Elim, and encamped by the Red Sea.”

WE have now lingered long enough in lovely Elim, enjoyed the delightful shade of its palm-trees, eaten of their fruit, and quenched our thirst at its fountains. We naturally seek to perpetuate pleasing enjoyments, and to leave affliction and temptation to others. But the Holy Spirit has other things to testify to us, besides bearing witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and that God is love in Christ Jesus. He will not and cannot always comfort, but must also grieve us; not merely heal, but also wound; not merely tranquillize, but also disturb; not merely manifest himself as a refreshing dew, but also as a fire, and as a “Spirit of judgment and burning,” to those upon whom he vouchsafes to operate. He does not always make use of the gospel, but also of the law; not merely of the promises, but also of the threatenings; and speaks, not merely of consolation, but also of duty. He exalts, but humbles also; he translates into the third heaven, but likewise brings

down to the pit ; comforts richly, but also lets us experience great distress ; he even kills, but also makes alive. If he intends to teach thee that Christ is the way, he will hedge up every other path ; and if he gives thee to experience that he is the life, thou wilt find nothing but death elsewhere. The corn would not yield its harvest unless the winter passed over it, and hence it is sown in autumn, and the noblest of all plants, the vine, is pruned the most. Similar to this are the occurrences of the inward life ; through what travail and distress, through what a variety of deaths must the true Christian pass !

Elim is not Canaan ; the children of Israel must depart from thence, and proceed further. Let us accompany them. Let us see how the Lord has acted from the commencement of time, that we may be comforted, corrected, and instructed in righteousness.

From Elim they were obliged to travel towards the Red Sea ; and because the cloudy pillar stayed its course, they were also obliged to halt, erect their tents, and encamp. On this side of Elim they were more at their ease than on the other side, where they were not permitted to encamp, but go forwards for three successive days, and take their repose during the night, as well as they were able, on the hard ground, and in the open air. Thus in the christian course, it is sometimes easier than at others. At one time there seems to be a truce to hostility, but afterwards the conflict only becomes the hotter and more fatiguing, which is then succeeded by a season of refreshing.

The Red Sea is also called the Sea of Reeds, from the quantities of the latter which grow on its shores. The reason why the cloudy pillar led them to that sea,

through which they had passed only a few days before, is easily discovered. They were to remember the way by which the Lord had led them. They were to call to mind, in a very lively manner, the great deliverance they had received, contrary to all their expectations. They were maturely to reflect upon the mighty effects of the wrath and love of God, his severity and his kindness—his wrath and severity towards the ungodly, as manifested in an awful manner upon the Egyptians; and his love and kindness towards his people, even towards them that trust in him, and confide themselves to him. Both were intended to lead them to repentance, that they might become more and more conformed to God. The sight of this sea, therefore, excited love in them towards such a gracious God, and fear towards one so holy; confidence in such a powerful God, and resignation towards one so wonderful and faithful. They were to learn to say with Paul, “He hath redeemed us from so great a death, delivers us daily, and we trust will still deliver.” What confidence with respect to the future ought not this consideration to have produced in them! With what very different eyes could they now look upon the same sea, which only a few days before they viewed with so much dread! How very natural it was to make a comparison between the two, and how fresh it was still in their memories! Probably the dead bodies of the Egyptians were still lying on the shore, with all their implements of war, whilst they stood there in safety, none daring to make them afraid. What an encouragement might they derive from this circumstance for the future; how ashamed they might feel because of their unbelief and mistrust; and how strongly incited in future to hope in the living

God, and to love, fear, and honour him with their whole hearts ! Well might it here be said, “ O that thou wouldst hearken unto me ; then should thy peace flow like a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea ! ”

But what a perverse nation were the Israelites ! They had no eyes to see, no ears to hear ; and no heart to understand. “ The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib ; ” and although both are regarded as the most stupid of the animal race, yet they remember where they have been fed, and recognise their keeper. But this people encamped by the Red Sea, just as if they themselves had been reeds, without understanding or reflection—nay, we shall soon find, that they murmured and expressed distrust. Do not let us suppose, however, that we are better than they ; but let us, from their example, infer the depravity of our own hearts, and the necessity of what the Red Sea typifies to us—of our being cleansed by the blood and the Spirit of Jesus Christ, and therefore be induced to seek it.

And are we not also encamped on the shores of a sea, from which we may learn the goodness and severity of God, as well as our own corruption and misery ? The word of God, the history of his dealings with mankind, the holy sacraments and ordinances of divine appointments—all these form a mighty sea, which we ought to regard with due consideration, and from which we ought to learn wisdom. I do not, indeed, pretend to be able to pourtray to you the whole extent of this boundless ocean, nor to enter upon a detail of all that it presents to us. Jesus Christ remains the centre, in which the scattered rays unite themselves as in their

focus, and in whose face the glory of God reflects itself; the consideration of him, therefore, is that which is the more needful and salutary for us. To become duly acquainted with sin and grace is our lesson; and both is best seen in him, who was made both sin and righteousness, when we see how God himself spared not his own Son—after making him to be sin for us—neither in body nor soul, and laid him in the dust of death without mercy—we then see perfectly what sin must be in the eyes of God, since he takes such vengeance upon it, and requires such a sacrifice. How deeply does this humble us; to what repentance and self-denial does it call us! But where do we find also such a display of grace as in the face of Jesus Christ? It is certainly affecting when Jesus describes to us the loving heart of God as receiving the returning prodigal with more than parental kindness, as sweeping the whole house to find the lost piece of silver, and as a faithful shepherd, joyfully carrying home the strayed sheep on his shoulders; or when he invites all that are weary and heavy laden to come to him that they may find rest, and promises gratuitously the water of life, &c. But all these are only like lovely and glittering dew-drops, and are not the Sun of Righteousness itself. What an immense ocean of grace is presented to us in the fact, that “God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son;” and that the Son loved us so much, as to lay down his life for us! O that we were indeed encamped on the shores of this sea, and that the Holy Spirit would hover on the face of the waters, which are rendered so palatable and salutary by the wood of the cross; that thus we might comprehend the height, and depth, and length, and breadth of the

mercy of God in Christ Jesus ; and that the reeds of impenitence and unbelief might not hinder us from seeing what can only be seen in his light ! Of a truth, even as Israel's enemies perished in the sea, so we may here say, " My sins disappear like flax in the burning flame, and plunged into such an abyss, if sought for will never be found." These are the waters of which Ezekiel writes, that they first came up to his ancles, then to his knees, his loins, and at length were wide enough to swim in ; and could no more be passed over. How glorious will be that crystal sea, mingled with fire, mentioned in Revelations xv., on which those stand, who have gotten the victory, and chaunt to the harps of God, the song of Moses and the Lamb !

The various experience of the Christian is also a sea, on the shores of which he occasionally encamps, to call to mind all the way by which the Lord hath led him. This experience is of a two-fold nature—humiliating and exhilarating. " Who can tell how oft he offendeth ?" and how great is the multitude of secret faults ! How little self-knowledge is requisite to perceive that we come short of the glory of God ; and how great must be the blindness of those who will not admit of this ! But if we judge correctly of our own hearts, according to the description given of them in the infallible word of God, we have a sea before us, whose waves cast forth mire and dirt, which surrounds itself with all kinds of excuses and palliations, as with reeds, in order not to be seen in its true, that is, in its hideous colours. This is also a sea, on which we ought to encamp, that we may become thoroughly acquainted with our wretchedness and our misery. The

sight, though disagreeable is useful—painful, but salutary. And where is the Christian, who whilst reviewing his previous career, does not call to mind many an anxious season and many a period of great inward distress, through which he has had to pass, in which his soul sunk within him, and he thought nothing less than that it was all over with him? But how pleasing has also been his experience occasionally, which justly remains as memorable to him, as that to which David alludes in the words, “Forget not all his benefits.” What glorious prospects have been sometimes afforded him, and with what divine brightness has the truth shone upon him! In what fulness has he often perceived Jesus Christ, so that he no longer felt apprehensive on account of his extreme wretchedness and his many deficiencies, but could triumphantly exclaim, “Who is he that condemneth? seeing Christ hath died; yea, rather is risen again, and sitteth on the right hand of God, interceding for us.” What holy feelings often pervaded his mind, even like what the Israelites felt at the Red Sea, when beholding the destruction of their enemies, in the idea that now his corrupt nature was entirely put off, although afterwards, to his great astonishment, it manifested itself again, and he was again obliged to prepare for the conflict! What admirable assurance of faith and fervour of love, power, and hope here often animated him, so that he was able to say, “The snare is broken, and we are escaped!” In short, it affords an useful subject of meditation to reflect upon the variety of experience of which we have been the subjects; and the first shedding abroad of the love of God in the heart remains, in particular, ever memorable to us; and how many have been able to note down the

very day and hour in which this was communicated to them!

It appears, however, that the children of Israel did not regard the Red Sea, thus again presented to their sight, with those salutary feelings, which it ought to have produced in them; and this blindness is still but too frequent. The sea of the divine wonders in the Holy Scriptures expands itself before the eyes of men—wonders, which are in fact almost incredible—that God has sent his Son into the world—not to judge the world, but that the world through him should be saved. But how does the world act on such an occasion? The mass of the impenitent and unconverted remain totally indifferent and unmoved. Some are sceptical, and are prevented by the reeds of doubt from beholding this great sight. Others even marvel at it, and are so captivated by self-complacency, as to imagine no one can see what they cannot. In short, their hearts are hardened, and although the solemn truths of Scripture and the ordinances of divine appointment are placed before their eyes—yet they continue in their infatuation, nor come sufficiently to themselves to say, “I will arise and go to my Father.”

But what sacred, pleasing, and encouraging ideas must the sight of this sea have awakened in Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb, and other believers and devout men amongst the people; so that they doubtless preferred it to the pleasing shades of Elim! What an affecting sermon did the sea preach to them! How different did this side appear to them to the other, before which they had stood, with Pharaoh in their rear! And in general, how differently do we judge of

many things after passing through them, than we did whilst anticipating them !

But does the sight of this sea—does the contemplation of our spiritual blessings and privileges produce the effect it reasonably ought upon those who really possess spiritual life ? and does it yield the fruit which it ought ? Where do we perceive strong faith, confident hope, ardent love, steadfast patience, victory over the world, godliness in the whole deportment, heavenly-mindedness, tender brotherly kindness, friendly forbearance ? How imperfect is the exhibition of these virtues in general ! How much unbelief, impatience, pride, and the like still exists, and how much worldly-mindedness, frivolity and sin !—all which are proofs how much cause we have to pray with David, “ Open thou mine eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of thy law ! ” How many mourners are there still in Zion, who require to be comforted !

This is much to be lamented. Therefore grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; for if this dwell in you richly, it will cause you to be neither barren nor unfruitful, and so shall an abundant entrance be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May he grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, and an understanding heart to observe his statutes, that our peace may be as a river, and our righteousness as the waves of the sea !

IX.

THE WILDERNESS OF SIN.

NUMB. xxxiii. 11.

“ And they removed from the Red Sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin.”

THE seventh encampment of the Israelites took place in a wilderness, called Sin. A wilderness is a region uninhabited and uninhabitable by men, because neither water nor vegetation exist there, unless it be prickly thorns. Snakes, scorpions, and such like dangerous and poisonous animals alone take up their abode there, and travelling through such districts has in it always something terrific. The Lord, speaking by the prophet Hosea, says, “ I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness,” and this he says, not by way of menace, but as a paternal correction ; on which account he immediately adds, “ and speak comfortably unto her.” A spiritual wilderness is, therefore, here meant. It consists in the being deprived of every support, in which the individual might place his confidence, irrespective of God, which consequently compels him to fix his hopes solely on the living God ; for he never does this as long as he has any thing left with which he can commit idolatry, which must therefore be taken from him. And when this is the case, he is led, spiritually, into the wilderness. This privation of all support is

both of an external and internal nature, and sometimes combined. How often was David deprived of all outward support, but never to such a degree as when he fled before Saul into the wilderness of Maon, where he was entirely shut in, and could no longer escape the hands of Saul. Here human aid and counsel was at an end, and he was obliged to leave God to act, who rescued him quite unexpectedly, by the arrival of a messenger, who informed Saul of an irruption of the Philistines, by which he was compelled to refrain from pursuing David, whom he had, so to speak, already in his power. He was in a similar situation, though not so entirely forsaken, when he fled from his own son Absalom; and if God had not so ordered it that Absalom regarded the counsel of Hushai more than of Ahitophel, David, according to all appearance, must have been overthrown.

Abraham had no visible support for his belief in the promise of a son, but even much that was dispiriting and discouraging, since Sarah was not only unfruitful, but was also so old, that she could only conceive by a miracle.

Jehoshaphat, when marching against an innumerable host of foes, exclaimed, "We have no might against the great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do;" yet adds, but "our eyes are up unto thee." Nothing was left him but God.

The apostle Paul also, when in Asia, was once in such straits, that he saw nothing but death before him, and no means of escape; but tells us himself the reason of it, which was, that he might not place confidence in himself, but in the living God.

And how strikingly do we see this displayed in the

case of Peter! On seeing Jesus walking on the sea, he felt inclined to beg of Jesus to tell him to come to him. When Jesus had done so, he descended from his vessel upon the water, and walked upon it as on dry land. But he had not gone far, before a wind suddenly arose, which moved the sea under his feet, and reminded him of its insecure nature. Terrified, he began to sink. Jesus was then his only refuge, to whom also he applied most earnestly, and was rescued.

And how often has it been the case with believers, that they saw no way of escape externally, and were compelled to say, "Save, Lord, or we perish!" This outward privation of support certainly attacks sensibility not a little, and may occasion sorrow enough, as many amongst us can testify from experience. But there are also inward privations and abandonments, which, though not visible, are even far more painful and difficult to bear than the former. By these inward abandonments, the soul is deprived of consolation, joy, courage, and light, to which the Scriptures refer when speaking of those who walk in darkness and have no light, and of distress of soul, and the hiding of God's countenance, which may be abundantly seen in the Psalms. The man's confidence in himself then departs, and nothing is left him but God and his free grace, from whom he must expect every thing, since he can do nothing of himself.

In the case of Job, the abandonment and privation was both inward and outward at the same time. He was suddenly stripped of all his possessions, and then deprived even of his inward joy and strength. He suffered the terrors of God, so as almost to make him despair. Did not the disciples find themselves in a

similar situation when they saw Jesus hanging dead upon the cross, in losing whom, they had lost all? nay, what did he himself experience on the cross, when suffering bodily excruciating torments, and forsaken of God in his soul?

The Christian, therefore, must not be surprised at experiencing such a state of destitution, since Jesus Christ was content to do so. Frequently such abandonments occur suddenly, and vanish as unexpectedly, whilst in their place, the soul enjoys a superabundance of spiritual blessings; but in most cases they come on gradually. They have also various degrees, so that to some there is still something left to which they can cleave, be it a promise, the remembrance of former experience, or the like. From others every thing is taken, so that their state is truly pitiable, and they are ready to say with Heman, "I am counted with them that go down into the pit. I am as a man that hath no strength, and as one whom thou rememberest no more."

Thus the Lord leads his people into the desert, where they have no sensible, nor susceptible support, like the children of Israel; but he does so in order to speak comfortably to them, to empty them of all self-confidence, and lead them to place implicit trust in himself. This ought to serve, therefore, as a strong incitement to humility, and as a preventive against self-exaltation; for all we possess is only borrowed property, which no one can retain in such a manner as to prevent its being taken from him. "For what have we that we have not received? But if we have received it, why do we boast, as if we had not received it?" But on the other hand, there is a sweet consolation to those who are thus des-

titute and apparently forsaken; for, even as “before destitution the heart of man is haughty,” so “before honour is humility.” It is the Lord’s plan to “fill the hungry with good things, whilst the rich are sent empty away.” Nor was this desert equally barren throughout; for a few days journey further lies Rephidim, where there are at present many pleasant gardens, from whence the monks, who dwell there, derive their subsistence. The Israelites were compelled to enter this desert, because God was desirous of accustoming them to look to him alone.

The wilderness in which the Israelites were now encamped, was called Sin, in which also Mount Sinai lay, and from which the latter took its name. It signifies a thorn and brier, as also enmity. Probably many thorns and briers grew in the desert, even as Moses saw one burning, when called to undertake the deliverance of Israel. And this rendered the journey the more fatiguing. Paul speaks of a thorn in the flesh, which gave him much to suffer. It would have been well if thorns had only grown in the desert, and if those who were travelling through it, had not also manifested a similar nature. But how often did they show themselves like pricking thorns, being full of wrath against Moses, and even against God himself! Paul describes the life of the natural man as existing in envy and malice, as hateful and hating one another; and it would be well if experience refuted instead of confirming the fact, that men are still what they ever were. The complaints of the want of love in the world, and even amongst Christians, are but too well founded; but let those who make them see to it, that they do not themselves give occasion for it. Love is, however, of

the greatest importance ; for he that abideth in love, abideth in God, and God in him. Love is from God, and not from ourselves ; and only he that is born of God possesses real love. Paul prefers it even to faith and hope, since the latter terminate, but the former abides. It constitutes, in reality, the image of God ; for " God is love." This image we have lost, and have become prickly thorns ; and, when occasion offers, show ourselves to be such. We must not, however, remain so, but become as the rose or the lily, and learn cordially to love each other.

Thorns are also a figure of a variety of temptations ; and the Lord Jesus employs them as an emblem of the cares of this world, deceitful riches, and various lusts, which choke the seed of the divine word. Thorns also represent a variety of sufferings, particularly such as are imposed upon every individual : hence Jesus speaks not only of taking up our cross in the general, but also in particular, when he says, " Let him take up his cross ;" which, like a painful thorn, is nevertheless salutary for the Christian.

Thorns remind us, also, of the curse which sin has caused, on which account God cursed the ground that it should bring forth thorns and thistles ; under which curse human nature also lies. But do they not also remind us of him who was crowned with thorns, because he became a curse for us, in order to redeem us from it ? Thus the thorn-bushes, in the midst of which the Israelites pursued their fatiguing march, reminded them of the Lord's favour towards them ; for it was in a thorn-bush that the Lord had appeared unto Moses in this very desert, and promised deliverance. Moses himself, at least, always remembered it, for he alludes to it in

his parting blessing forty years afterwards, when he said, "The good will of him that dwelt in the bush come upon thy head." (Deut. xxxiii. 16.)

Finally, they belong also to the promises: for instance, when it is said in Hosea, "I will hedge up thy way with thorns," in order to produce the resolution—"I will return unto the Lord from whom I have backslidden." And how salutary is such a thorn-hedge to an individual, in preventing him from pursuing his evil way, and compelling him to resort to the good way; however strong the thorns may be which compose it, so that the man finds it "hard to kick against the pricks." How salutary was it for the thief to be crucified, the blind man to be born so, Jonah to be swallowed by the fish, and King Manasseh to lie in fetters and in prison! Hence it may well be said, "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is no good sign, when outwardly every thing goes well with a man, and when he experiences no temptation inwardly; and therefore David justly acknowledges, with gratitude, the goodness of God in the humiliations he had experienced, by which he was rendered wise.

A man's sins, also, may become to him a prickly thorn-hedge, so that he gladly turns away from them; the law, as a severe schoolmaster, may also drive him to Christ; inward depression and dejection may render him susceptible and desirous of the consolation presented to him by the gospel. And when the individual has once entered upon the narrow way, how useful may such thorn-hedges be to him, for the purpose of preserving him in it, however severely they may lacerate him. Thus one person is exercised by bodily weakness, another by domestic affliction, and a third by some other

cause, which continually compels them to look to the Lord, to which we must be excited, either by necessity or love. There is always something to keep the Christian humble, and to preserve him from climbing the heights of self-exaltation, whether it be a thorn in the flesh, or the buffeting of Satan. Paul bore always about with him the dying of the Lord Jesus, and was burdened as long as he was in this tabernacle. Asaph was willing that both heart and flesh should fail, if the Lord was the strength of his heart and his portion.

In this chapter we are furnished only with a list of the various encampments of the Israelites, but are not informed of what occurred there. But this deficiency is supplied in *Exod. xvi.* The Israelites had now been a month on their journey, and the provisions they had brought with them were all consumed. This is not to be wondered at, but rather that they should have lasted so long; which can scarcely be conceived, unless connected with the idea of a secret blessing, like that extended to the widow's cruse of oil and barrel of meal. The latter circumstance appears miraculous to us, and we are ready to ask, "How can such a thing be?" especially since it has never since occurred. But God is able to do things of a similar nature, though in a less obvious manner. Have we not lived to experience a season, in which the crops not only failed, but when that which was reaped contained also little strength and nutriment; so that the word of the prophet Haggai (*i. 6.*) was fulfilled, "Ye have sown much, and brought in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not satisfied; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages putteth them into a bag with holes." We have also experienced

times when, in consequence of the great consumption of provisions and provender by men and horses during the war, a famine seemed inevitable; and yet it did not occur, and many knew not what to think when in the Spring they found they had abundance of every thing. But they that were wise perceived in it the gracious finger of God.

This wonderful goodness manifested itself in the case of the provision brought by the children of Israel out of Egypt. It is incredible that they should have been able to take so much with them, as sufficed to feed such an immense multitude for a whole month, and yet it proved sufficient. Nor was this the only marvellous circumstance; but how remarkable is it also, that their clothes did not wear out, especially their shoes, which were the most exposed to it! O, it is no less true, that even as the children of Israel were surrounded by wonders in the wilderness, so we also, had we but eyes to see and ears to hear!

Necessity renders men sagacious, able, and expert. It might have been supposed that the children of Israel, during so long a period, in which they needed no art nor manufacture, would have become half savage, and have lost all ability for mechanical employments; yet they fabricated the most costly and delicate articles in gold, and the most ingenious curtains and clothing for the use of the sanctuary. And by what means did they attain to such scientific skill? The Lord himself informs us: "I have filled them with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship," (Exod. xxxi. 3.) so that Moses even understood how to reduce gold to powder—an art which was so little understood a long time after,

that it was regarded as impossible. "O Lord!" exclaims David, "how great and manifold are thy works?" "He that observeth these things, understandeth the loving-kindness of the Lord;" "the earth is full of his goodness."

But although the provisions of the Israelites had lasted them beyond their expectations, yet they were now entirely consumed; and this at a time when they were not in Elim, where the fruit of the palm-trees might have afforded them some supply, but in the desert, where nothing grew but thorns. They were therefore in great distress; nothing to eat, and no means of procuring any thing. In such circumstances, how much they needed such a God as Jehovah, although they did not always believe that he was with them; for if they had believed it, they would always have been of good courage. But how did they act on this occasion, and how did the Lord act towards them? These questions will be answered in the following chapter.

"What is man," says Job, "that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him; that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" (chap. vii. 17, 18.) What induces him to this, but the greatness of his love? May this love of the Father, the grace of the Son, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all! Then, though our path may lie through a desert, and every desirable support give way and disappear, yet we are marching towards Canaan. May Thy good Spirit lead us upon a plain path, and receive us at length to thy glory!

X.

THE BREAD FROM HEAVEN.

EXOD. xvi. 1—4.

“ And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came into the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

“ And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

“ And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full ; for ye have brought us into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

“ Then said the Lord unto Moses, Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them whether they will walk in my law, or no.”

WE left the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sin, where they had to remain a long time, for it was of great extent—a horrible wilderness, full of thorns, and yielding nothing that could contribute to the support of life. And, in reality, the whole earth, as regards the Spirit, is nothing but a great and barren desert. We will not seek to prove this to those who, as Jude says, “ have not the Spirit.” It may be, that to such

this world may offer such satisfaction, that they would gladly leave heaven to God and his saints, if but the earth were left to them, and they to the earth. To the Spirit, however, the earth, with all its valuables, is only a wilderness, which furnishes no food adapted for it, and for which it longs. What is the world and all that it contains, considered as it is in reality? "Vanity of vanities," says Solomon. This he asserts upon his own experience, and from possessing himself the highest glory the world could bestow; and what he says is valid still. Happy is he, therefore, to whose feelings and judgment this world is only a barren waste, and who seeks only to travel through it as well as he is able! Happy he who knows and seeks another and a better country, as did the holy patriarch! No true Christian is here at home, nor can he find on earth what can satisfy his soul.

We will now resume the thread of our narrative, and see how the Israelites acted, and what the Lord did for them.

The people behaved very ill. It is true their distress was extreme; famine appeared amongst them, and they saw no means of procuring food. They therefore expected nothing but a dreadful death, unless God himself appeared in their behalf. Let us have compassion on them, but reflect at the same time, that we ought so to perceive the greatness of our distress, as to be conscious that the ordinary means do not suffice, and that God himself must really interpose. He must draw me, otherwise I cannot come; he must teach me, otherwise I shall not understand; he must grant me faith, otherwise I shall be unable to believe; he must fight for me, otherwise I shall not conquer. We must then also feel

a hunger after Christ, which can be satisfied with nothing less than the possession and enjoyment of him. And happy is the country into which the Lord sends such a hunger !

Egypt occurred to the children of Israel in their painful circumstances—not its bondage and its heavy burdens, but its agreeable things—its flesh-pots and its bread, of which they had abundance, as they asserted. Individual Christians also sometimes experience such painful events, they that feel tempted to esteem the wicked happier than they. Was it not the case with Job and Jeremiah, that they wished they had never been born ? Certainly a true Christian has great reason not to think it strange as regards the fiery trial, by which he is tried, and if some strange thing happened to him ; yet it often appears strange and incomprehensible enough to him. If every thing is to work together for good to them that fear God, he may certainly consider himself safe in every situation, and under the most painful trials ; but he is not thereby saved from them.

The children of Israel wished, that if death were inevitable, they had rather died in another manner, and in Egypt. Were they wrong in this ? Is not dying of hunger one of the most dreadful species of deaths ? We must, however, renounce our own will, and leave God to do as he pleases. But this is easier said than practised. It caused even Jesus himself to sweat blood. When called upon to die to ourselves, we would gladly choose the kind of death. But this choice is not left us. A surgeon knows better than his patient where and how deep he ought to make the incision. We are not always in a situation to perceive what end some particular suffering is to answer ; but have then so much

the superior opportunity of saying with Job, "I will lay my hand upon my mouth;" and be mute as a lamb, according to the example of Christ, who opened not his mouth.

The children of Israel express the greatest distrust of Moses and his brother Aaron. They accuse them of the basest intentions, as if they had only brought them thither to cause them to die of hunger. Could any thing be more absurd? Had they any more to eat than the rest? and were not they as much in danger of perishing as themselves? But doth not Jesus say, that folly is one of the evil things that proceedeth out of the heart of man? And every thought and every expression, which is not in accordance with the word of God, deserves this appellation. How full of folly is the world, the greater part of the books that are published, many sermons that are preached, and our own hearts! If we were to attempt to prove this in detail, we should never have done. We will only remark, that Christ is alone the truth, and that all truth must proceed from him to us. Further, that there is much irrationality in most of the objections of those that are concerned for their salvation.

The distrust expressed by the people of Israel was, however, very culpable and unreasonable. It was neither the first nor the greatest extremity to which they had been reduced, and out of which they had been delivered; that which they had experienced at the Red Sea was much greater. There they became acquainted with God, as one who never suffers those that hope in him to be confounded. And why, therefore, do they not trust in him? why not resignedly commit themselves to him? He had promised to con-

duct them to Canaan, and he will keep his word. If they do not know where to obtain food, neither did they know how to pass through the Red Sea; and yet they did pass through it. God's knowledge is as boundless as his power. Nor do we expect too much from the children of Israel, in supposing this would have produced a permanent impression upon them; they ought rather to have rejoiced over their wants and their helplessness, because both gave the Lord opportunity to prove, that both counsel and performance are his. But nothing of all this: they act as if there were no God—as if he were unable to help. Such is human nature: where the bodily eye does not see, and the hand grasp, mistrust manifests itself; and this is both very lamentable and very culpable.

But are men in a state of nature able to act otherwise? Confidence in God is regarded by the natural man as a species of superstition; and he seeks to justify his want of it by saying, "God works no more miracles." Nor are any outward means able to root out this mistrust; otherwise, the Jews would have been compelled to believe, because of the many undeniable miracles which Jesus did. It even happens occasionally, that those who have had the most powerful assurances of their state of grace, have afterwards been the most violently assaulted on that very point, and induced to regard every thing with a suspicious eye, which had previously been so strikingly clear to them. He that desires an immutable security, must seek it in Him, whose promises are yea, and amen.

Thus did the people act, and by so doing, rendered themselves deserving of punishment. But although Moses pointed out to them their sinful conduct, yet the

Lord did not punish them for it : he had suffered them to fall into these distressing circumstances, in order to manifest the glory of his presence in helping them ; for God said he would rain bread upon them in abundance, and give them flesh besides. The latter was fulfilled the same evening ; for an innumerable multitude of quails fell round their tents, which they killed and ate. Bread they found the next morning, which, from their question, “ *Manhu* ? ”—What is it ? obtained the name of Manna. The Israelites found the manna the next morning round about the encampment, as soon as the dew had departed. It had descended quietly and noiselessly about day-break, and formed little pearl-white globules. It fell from heaven during the six week days, but not on the Sabbath ; in the former it kept no longer than from day to day ; but that which was gathered on the Friday remained good over the Sabbath. According to the book of Wisdom, the manna tasted to every one as he pleased. Certain it is from Scripture, that he that gathered little had no lack, and he that gathered much had nothing over ; but each one had gathered as much as he required for himself. To explain this, we must either admit of a new miracle, or perhaps more correctly suppose, that the whole mass was brought to certain persons appointed for the purpose, who measured out an omer unto each, so that all received alike. Thus Paul views it in 2 Cor. viii. on which he founds the remark, that the abundance of the one should supply the deficiencies of the other. Although it was the only food which the Israelites had, yet it was not only satisfying to all, but suitable and salutary for all. It was adapted for little children, as well as for those that were grown

up; for the sick, as well as for those that were in health.

But even with respect to this manna, there were those amongst the people who soon transgressed : some went out to seek for it on the Sabbath, but found it not ; others wished to lay it up for the following day ; nothing but greediness and unbelief could have incited them to this : the former being never satisfied, and not content with daily bread ; the latter induced them to provide themselves with some stock for the future, which seemed only acting prudently, because, irrespective of the divine promise, it could not be foreseen what might happen on the morrow, or the day after, and whether this singular phenomenon might not be discontinued. Both of these motives arise from the disinclination to live in dependence upon God, and from a wish to subsist as of themselves, which was the object of the first sin, from whence every other has sprung. God accustoms and renders his people capable of an entirely opposite manner of life—a life of complete dependence upon him. He might have so ordered it that the manna should have kept for a long period ; but he would have it so, and no otherwise. Merely on the Sabbath day did it continue good, and on no other ; but the manna which was preserved, in a golden cruse, in the most holy place, kept for centuries together. What other intention had God in this arrangement, than to lead his people to place implicit confidence in himself, his power, goodness, and faithfulness ? Every evening they were just as poor as they had been the day before, and just as helpless. They were therefore compelled to hope in God, and to venture upon him. If

they understood how to do this, they might have felt extremely happy. They had no particular trouble in gathering the manna, and were entirely relieved from care; for God cared for them in the most obvious manner. Their continued poverty might have proved a source of pleasure to them, because the Lord had thereby an opportunity of manifesting his riches in them.

But this state of mind the Lord required not of the Israelites alone—he requires it still: “Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” With these words Christ began his sermon on the mount; and in its continuation we clearly see what he intends to produce. He makes the most astonishing requirements of his followers; and the immediate object of Jesus in this sermon is, that we may be most strikingly convinced of our inability, as of ourselves, to fulfil them. Hence it is not a mere fortuitous circumstance that, in the next chapter, the history of the leper is related, who applied to Jesus, saying, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!” as if to point out to us the way, which is still more confirmed by the succeeding narrative of the healing of the centurion’s servant.

We must therefore become poor, to experience the unsearchable riches of Christ. But the sequel is not such as we suppose at the commencement. For what else do we imagine, particularly after the first reception of the blessings of reconciliation and peace, than that we shall now grow increasingly stronger; and even suppose that we shall in future have less and less need of Jesus, and become less and less troublesome to him.

We expect to grow up, in due time, from a weak infant to a strong man, and rejoice in the anticipation of all that we shall accomplish, when we are only able to walk a little more firmly.

We find, however, afterwards, that the case is very different; that we do not proceed from walking to running, and from running to flying, as with the wings of an eagle; but just the reverse. Poor, poorer, most poor: always poor, yet looking to him that is always rich: not leaning upon ourselves but upon him. Every morning going forth with an empty vessel, to gather fresh manna without the camp.

This manna has also another mysterious and typical signification, of which we read in John vi.; our Lord there expressly calls himself the Bread of Life, and gives us clearly to understand, that they only who feed upon him, have eternal life. By this we are to understand, that the hunger of the soul, which, even after conversion, seeks in a great measure to gratify itself with any thing else rather than with Christ, must be abstracted from all other objects, however laudable they may be in themselves, and be centered in Christ as the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely—as the overflowing fountain of all that is good, and all that can render us happy, both in this world and that which is to come. Those who thus hunger and thirst after him as the food of their souls, shall assuredly be satisfied by him, as with marrow and fatness, so that they shall be able to praise him with joyful lips. But this is “a hidden manna,” which, after all that is said and believed of it by professing Christians, is only communicated to, and enjoyed by few—even by those who overcome in

the times of trial and temptation, and who cease to eat that which is sacrificed to idols; and unto such also will be given a white stone, a favourable testimony in the presence of angels and of God, and a new name, which he alone knoweth, upon whom it is bestowed.

XI.

ENCAMPMENT IN DOPHKAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 12.

“And they took their journey out of the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah.”

ALTHOUGH our meditations on several passages in the history of the wanderings of Israel through the wilderness, are restricted to a single word, and that in a strange, and, to most readers, an unknown language, yet this is but of little consequence. The word, Jesus, is also a foreign word; and yet how much does this single word contain, and how wise and learned is he who understands it! In the language of Scripture, every name has its signification, which is not always the case in our own language, although it may be occasionally. In the Hebrew it is different; and names were frequently intentionally applied to persons and places, for the sake of their signification. Thus Eve means, the living one, and Adam called her so, because she was destined to be the mother of all living, and especially of the seed of the woman, who is the source of all life. In joyful expectation of the certain fulfilment of the divine promise, she called her first-born son, Cain, from a word

which implies gotten, and exclaimed, “ I have gotten him !” On proving, by his wickedness, that he has neither the woman’s seed itself, nor its progenitor, she manifested her faith, after Cain had slain Abel, by calling her third son Seth, which means placed ; because he was placed in the stead of his two brothers. We do not indeed find that the name Methuselah, which signifies a sending forth of death, was intentionally given him ; however, he seems to have received this name, not in a mere casual and arbitrary manner, since he died in the same year, in which the deluge burst forth as a sending forth of death. Noah’s name was intentional ; it means comfort and rest : for his parents said at his birth, “ The same shall comfort us in all our toil and labour upon earth, which the Lord hath cursed ;” and hence they gave him that name. God himself altered the names of Abram and Sarah, without, however, changing their signification ; but he interwove a letter of the name of Jehovah with theirs, which was a great and honourable distinction. Thus God commanded Moses to call his successor, Joshua, Jehoshua, thus giving him a syllable of his own most revered name. That Melchizedek was not accidentally so called, and that the place where he reigned was not casually termed Salem, is evident from the remarkable inferences which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews deduces from the meaning of these two names. Sarah called her son, Isaac, which signifies laughter ; because both she and Abraham had laughed on his account—he in faith, and she from unbelief. His children received their names from a natural cause ; for one was called Esau, because he was rough and hairy ; and the other Jacob, because he took his twin

brother by the heel at his birth. God himself called the latter Israel, a prince of God, because he had struggled both with God and man, and had overcome. He himself called a place Bethel, or the House of God, where he had the dream of the heavenly ladder; another, Mahanaim, because there two hosts of angels met him; and a third, Peniel, the face of God; for, said he, "I have seen God face to face." How remarkable did the name of Hagar appear to the apostle Paul, in its Arabic signification, and what mysteries he found in it! (Gal. iv.) In Genesis xxix. and xxx. we read how intentionally the different names were given to Jacob's twelve sons! Rachel called her youngest son, of whose birth she died, Benoni, or son of pain; but Jacob altered it to Benjamin, the true or dearest son. Pharaoh called Joseph, Zaphnat Paneah, or the father of the country, because Egypt had been saved from ruin by his wisdom. Why did his daughter call the child she drew out of the water, Moses, but on that very account, which she also mentioned as the reason of her giving him this name? Moses had also excellent reasons for calling one of his sons Gerson, stranger; the other Eleazer, the help of God; and he himself says, that he called the former so because he was compelled to be a stranger in a strange land. And you know how estimable the Apostle regards it in the patriarchs, that they thus termed themselves strangers, and thereby manifested their faith, in that they sought a better country in heaven, a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; hence God was not ashamed to be called their God. The latter he called so, as a living memorial of the divine deliverance, particularly from the hand of Pharaoh, that he might preserve it in grateful remem-

brance. Did not Samuel, whose own name indicates the circumstances of his birth, place a stone, and call it Ebenezer—help-stone—saying, “hitherto the Lord hath helped us?” Prudent Abigail alluded also to the meaning of her husband’s name, when she said, “he is justly called Nabal, that is, fool; for as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name, and folly is with him.” Nathan called Solomon Jedijah, that is, the Lord’s favourite, and his real name, which corresponds with “Prince of Peace,” is very applicable as a type of the true Prince of Peace.

This long dissertation therefore proves that Hebrew names have their particular signification, and that the latter is frequently very remarkable; because not merely the saints, but frequently God himself, gave names for the sake of their signification. It is therefore very natural for an admirer of the Holy Scriptures, to trace out, if he possesses ability for that purpose, the significations, together with the intention of such appellations; and observe in them whatever may serve for his edification.

We now come to consider the eighth encampment of the Israelites, called Dophkah. Nothing remarkable occurred here, but every thing proceeded in its natural course. They did nothing, either particularly evil or good; nor did the Lord perform there any thing remarkable. Thus with respect to the church in general, longer and shorter periods occur, in which nothing particular takes place, and the same may be said of individuals and their undertakings. The Christian has his periods, in which he receives no particular gracious communications, quickenings, enlightenings, or powerful impressions, and is equally free from particular

trials and sufferings. His course is distinguished by nothing of a peculiar nature. His corruption is not excited, any more than the grace he possesses. The truths of the gospel are not indifferent to him, nor do they produce any particular effect upon him. He reads, prays, and hears; but not with the same animation as at other times; and if he observes that this is the case with him, though it may trouble him, yet he is obliged to wait.

The same is the case with some of those things which are undertaken for the glory of God, and which seem for a time to be in a state of stagnation. The gospel is preached, it is true; but its effects are seldom manifested. New awakenings rarely occur, and the converts themselves do not seem to make the progress they ought. Nothing of moment occurs out of the sphere of the christian church. The reports from those who labour amongst Jews and heathens contain nothing encouraging. The hopes entertained, are not confirmed; and we are compelled to trust, that the future will afford us that which the present denies us. Much may be talked about, but there is little fruit or substance. They are encamped in Dophkah, and this is really almost all that can be said with truth, however much we might wish it otherwise.

This encampment lay still further to the right of the direct road to Canaan, and removed still further from it, so that it seemed that they were travelling any where, rather than to Canaan. The same thing also frequently occurs in the guidance of the children of God. Their path seems to them to go quite contrary to their conceptions, and if they had had the ordering of it, it would have been very different. It is however very lamentable,

when men really remove further and further from truth and godliness, and at the same time from God and the heavenly Canaan. Such was formerly the case, when the doctrines that were taught, gradually degenerated into superstition; in the place of which, infidelity, which is still worse, has by degrees appeared. How many, in younger years, have seemed to be not far from the kingdom of God, have experienced many convictions and good emotions, and formed many laudable resolutions, who, in the sequel, turned their backs upon it! But even those, who seek to work out their salvation with all earnestness, may seem to themselves to go backward, rather than forward, and to remove further from the object they have in view, instead of approaching nearer to it, and think that all their efforts are in vain. This is a cause of great grief to them. But in the kingdom of Christ, that which seems to be a retrograde movement, may be a real advance, and decrease may be increase. For a decrease of confidence in ourselves, is an increase, or at least a means of promoting it; since it serves to bring us off from our own natural basis, and to establish us on the only true foundation. And this grounding and settling, is as necessary as the being perfected.

Therefore, since we are informed of nothing remarkable having occurred at Dophkah, either on the part of God or his people—we must keep to the literal signification of the name of the place. Let us first apprehend it passively; the meaning of the name of this encampment implies, that they were beaten and rendered pliant. We need not here imagine to ourselves weapons and hostile nations, who fought against them; for from these they at present enjoyed repose. But it

continues true, that "through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." Be not too secure in Elim, for a Dophkah will follow. Neither be too desponding at Dophkah, for a Rephidim, a couch of rest, succeeds. He that runs forward without chastisement, and does as he pleases, does not belong to the people of God; for the latter have their Dophkahs, where they are chastised. This indeed presupposes previous misconduct, which is to be removed by the correction of the Father, that we may become partakers of his holiness. The children of Israel had doubtless given occasion enough for this. They had probably paid little regard to the great, manifold, wonderful, and divine benefits, deliverances, and assistance they had received; and perhaps showed little gratitude for them. They therefore received deserved correction. Nor must we imagine, that we deserve it less than they. For us, indeed, no Red Sea has been divided, no manna rained from heaven. But is not Christ, in his sufferings and triumph, visibly set before us, and the great love of God held up to our view? Yet what effect has it produced? On the whole, nothing more than the sight of the Red Sea, on whose shores the children of Israel beheld the corpses of their overwhelmed foes. But we ought reasonably to grieve at being so little affected by the sufferings which we have caused Christ. And how much naughtiness is there still in us, which must be laid aside, and to which the chastisements we receive ought to induce us! Of a truth, Dophkah is a needful and useful encampment; however far off, Canaan may there appear to us, and however much the stripes we may there receive may pain us. Our corrupt na-

tures ought not to be otherwise dealt with, but must, like the vine, be kept continually under the knife. The Lord has various kinds of rods. He can visit us with bodily sufferings, cause us to suffer temporal loss, excite others, and even Satan himself against us; he can make texts and passages of Scripture serve as pointed thorns to us, against which we shall find it hard to kick; he can also let us feel his displeasure in our consciences in such a manner, as to pain us like poisoned arrows. Nay, our own thoughts, desires, and apprehensions may become painful scourges to us.

When encamped at Dophkah, we must endure these strokes, and not withdraw ourselves from them. Did not even Jesus frequently inflict severe stripes upon his disciples, without using any outward flagellation, nor even spare his own mother? For when at Cana, he said to her, "woman, what have I to do with thee? my hour is not yet come." How was Paul buffeted even by a messenger of Satan, without taking into account all his other inward and outward afflictions? Who then ought to act in an unruly manner, when his station is appointed at Dophkah, and not take it to heart when it is said, "thy iniquity is the cause of thy being thus reprov'd, and thy disobedience, that thou art thus corrected?"

Dophkah also signifies knocking, as applicable to hard substances, in order to render them pliable. Our hearts are termed stony, and are therefore represented as something hard and refractory. But they must be rendered pliant, flexible, and soft like wax, which is effected by divine grace. The latter, however, employs a variety of means for this purpose, both at the begin-

ning, and in the sequel, the chief of which are, the law and the gospel. The law indeed does not soften the heart; but it discovers its hardness and its sins, and thus compels it to lay aside its presumption, and the ideas of its own strength and righteousness. The more clearly any one perceives the sublimity of holiness demanded by the law, so much the less of it does he find in himself, and therefore is the more compelled to seek it in Christ. The law occasions anxiety, terror, inability, and distress, rather than a softened heart; but it also causes the sinner, who had been previously careless, sunk in sin and worldly mindedness, and in the vain idea of his own strength and righteousness, eagerly to listen when Christ is spoken of, who was before so indifferent to him. But when the Holy Spirit preaches the gospel to such a poor sinner—how God in Christ is a God of all grace, with whom is plenteous redemption; how Christ is our righteousness, and how we are complete in him, so that he can apply this to his own person—he then softens, and his heart melts like wax, and the love of Christ begins to constrain him. But the depravity of the human heart does not let it be long before the deluded individual thinks he has already attained. He is then obliged again to encamp at Dophkah, where he is chastised, and feels compelled to condescend to men of low estate, and becomes like a solitary sparrow on the house-top, and like a pelican in the wilderness.

But Dophkah also means being cast or thrown, as it were, to and fro. Thus there are seasons, in which the individual's state appears so strange to him, that he cannot comprehend it, and his doubts of its correctness distress his mind, which becomes like an agitated sea.

When the disciples were sifted and scattered every one to his own, they were thus thrown hither and thither, being tossed with tempest and not comforted.

Having thus considered the word Dophkah in its passive signification, we will now make a few observations with reference to its active meaning.

And we are first reminded by it of the words of Christ, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." This knocking, though not in itself converting grace, is yet something, which may for a long time precede real conversion, although the latter does not always follow it. These knockings are something general, and serve at least to divest the sinner of all excuse, so that it may be justly said of him, "he would not." They consist in a conviction of the mind of an individual, that he cannot possibly be saved, if he continues his present course, but that he must commence a different mode of life. He also probably feels himself called upon to listen to the preaching of the word, to read the Bible, pray, and receive the sacrament; he becomes uneasy and distressed; he also occasionally feels pleasure at the idea of becoming a Christian, having his sins forgiven, and knowing that they are so. And certainly, the most of those who dwell in parts where an abundance and variety of the means of grace exist, will have experienced such knockings as these. Providential occurrences, sicknesses, the death of friends, and the like, are all calculated to impress the mind in such a manner, as to excite the individual to seriousness and reflection.

He ought, then, to give heed, and consider in this his day, the things that belong to his peace. He must not treat such impressions in a light manner, or even

seek to erase them by worldly amusements, but retire to solitude and prayer, and remember that it is Jesus who stands before the door, and desires admission into the heart. He ought therefore to strive to open the door, that Jesus may come in and keep a feast with him; and reflect that if he neglects this his day of grace, he lays new hindrances in the way of his salvation, grieves, nay, quenches the Holy Spirit, and suffers the devil to establish himself so much the more firmly in him. It is then time to work out his salvation with fear and trembling, to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, and to strive to enter in at the strait gate.

Happy is the man who duly attends to this knocking! Such a one acts in a similar manner, and knocks also, until the door is opened to him; he spares no prayers nor supplications, cries nor tears, but is resolved to pass through the strait gait, and enter upon the narrow way, whatever it may cost him. He knows that Jesus hears prayers and supplications, and therefore he is determined to importune and call upon him, until he opens the door of his mercy to him, and casts all his sins behind him.

This is the proper mode of acting; and then it seldom lasts long, before it is said to the soul thus knocking, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, which no man shall shut." But, although this kind of knocking may belong more peculiarly to the beginning of conversion, yet, in the continuation of it, is every prayer and every sigh a repeated knocking, at one time more violently, at another more gently,—sometimes with impetuosity, and at other times with patience, until, at length, every door is opened, never to be closed again, and every barrier burst, never to be interposed any more.

Dophkah also signifies beating ; and the people of God shall eventually beat down all their opponents with the sword of the Spirit. Thus David says, in the 118th Psalm, “ In the name of the Lord will I destroy them ;” and as one of our hymns well expresses it :—

“ Though all the hosts of hell
Their baneful might oppose ;
Thine arm their rage shall quell,
And scatter all my foes.
Beneath my feet thou tread’st them down,
And giv’st to me the conqueror’s crown.”

The soul can even so far appropriate to itself the words of the promise and the grace of Jesus Christ, as to say, with Paul, “ Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors.” Unbelief is so completely overthrown by the passage, “ It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” that it dare not, for a long time, show itself again ; and the individual shakes off sin, like the eagle the dust from its wings. The courage of a young lion dwells in his breast, and he rushes through every obstacle with the firm conviction that Christ is with him, and that more are they that are for him, than all that can be against him ; he bursts forth as the day-break, before which the shadows flee away, “ fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.”

The Lord’s people are not always hurled about and shaken to and fro ; but cast and throw in their turn, and are right in doing so. They cast all their care upon God, knowing that he careth for them. If the law casts their sins against them, they, in return,

oppose it with the superabundant atonement of Christ. If reason seeks to throw difficulties in their way, they resist it with the Lord's faithful promises. Strong in the Lord, they cast far from them all their transgressions, with which they have transgressed, and renew themselves in the spirit of their minds.

Thus the tables are often turned, on which account the church says, "Rejoice not against me, O my enemy! when I fall I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me." And however it may go with us, we will still rejoice, in the confidence that now is our salvation nearer than when we believed, and that all things shall work together for our good.

Happy are ye, who, by heartfelt repentance, have turned your backs upon Egypt! although you may not always be encamped in the pleasant groves of Elim, but even occasionally at Dophkah, yet you are marching towards Canaan. There your songs of praise shall everlastingly resound to Him who brought you safely through. He is gone up before us, and we shall break through after him. To him be the glory and the praise!

XII.

ALUSH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 13.

“ And they departed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush.”

“ I WILL cause you to pass under the rod, and I will compel you into the bond of the covenant, saith the Lord.” (Ezek. xx. 37.) In these words, the Lord expresses a holy displeasure and indignation against his people, who had forsaken him, but which, it is evident from verse 41, was attended with blessed effects: “ I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered ; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.” God is able to tame the unruliness of men, not only in his anger, but also in his grace. He knows how to bring down those that exalt themselves, so as to make them assume a very different tone, and to raise up those that lie humbled in the dust, so desponding and comfortless, that one sigh expels another, and one tear flows into another, that neither of them know themselves any longer.

The Lord leads his people first in one way, and then in another, and commands first the south wind and then the north wind to blow upon his garden, "that the spices thereof may flow out."

This is particularly evident from the various encampments of the children of Israel, with the consideration of which, under the divine assistance, we shall now proceed; and may the Lord refresh us by his word!

Moses informs us, that the children of Israel removed from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush, which was only a short distance from thence. This place of encampment is not noticed elsewhere, nor does any thing remarkable appear to have occurred there suitable for communication. Thus there are also many things in christian experience, which are not adapted for being made public; some things would be found too profound, and others too exalted to be duly comprehended and applied by those who have not experienced any thing of a similar nature. Hence, how wisely and prudently does Paul express himself regarding a certain suffering which he had to endure, and which he calls a thorn in the flesh and the buffetings of Satan. The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls leads some individuals in such a manner, as if he commanded them to go and publish it in the ten cities; but others as though he told them to tell no one of it. Some persons have an amiable, others an edifying frankness in relating their good and evil, their sufferings and their consolations. But there may also be those, whose tongues are held from speaking, and to whom utterance is denied. It may likewise happen, that the individual himself does not comprehend the matter, and is obliged to leave both his temporal and spiritual concerns to the Lord.

We have also to premise, that though this station deviated, still more than the previous one, from the direct road to Canaan, yet, if the Israelites had been permitted to enter upon the latter, they would soon have been able to reach the promised land. We must likewise observe, that their route afterwards deviated no longer, but leads from thence by way of Rephidim and Sinai, as from an angle, directly across to Canaan. This is pleasing intelligence. Happy is he who does not always deviate from the right way, until a miserable death overtakes him ! But happier still is he, who arrives at a turning-point, in which he turns away from the world, sin, and vanity, to God and Jesus Christ ! But every one must arrive at such a turning-point in his life, in order that it may be well with him, and the earlier it occurs the better. All believers arrive at Alush. Although it may sometimes seem dark and dubious around them, and although this state may last for a considerable time, yet at length it turns out gloriously. Joseph was cast into prison ; Jonah into the whale's belly ; Job degraded to sit on a dunghill ; Christ the Lord condemned to the accursed tree ; and Israel to Alush : but at length a marvellous change is experienced. Happy is he who has reason to hope for such a glorious reversion with respect to his own person !

Consolatory is the prospect, that from Alush the path leads to Canaan, although in a slanting direction. But do not reckon upon this, or you will miscalculate : reflect, that the thirty-first encampment lies at no great distance from this, which is only the ninth ; so that, after the lapse of several years, the Israelites had retrograded again as far as they had advanced. And all

this way the Lord led them, that it might be made known what was in their hearts, in order that he might humble them, and afterwards do them good.

How highly do young and inexperienced Christians frequently think of themselves, and what expectations they have of what they will in future effect, and what they will still become! How boldly they open their mouths at Pibahiroth, as if they were masters in Israel, and as if wisdom would die with them! The growth of the Christian is spiritual, and therefore singular. "When I am weak, then am I strong," says the Apostle: "He must increase, but I must decrease," says the Baptist. He that imagines himself something, whilst he is nothing, deceiveth himself; and "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." He brings to nought that which is, and scatters the proud in the imaginations of their hearts; but he fills the hungry with good things, and raises up the needy from the dust. If we look to the route of the children of Israel, we shall find that once they had even to cross the very way by which they had formerly travelled. "What is man," exclaims Job, (chap. vii. 18.) "that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" Certainly, the Christian must be destined to something great, since it is necessary for him to undergo such a tedious and strange preparation; although the path of every one may not be so winding and circuitous.

Finally, we observe, that the people were still wandering in the wilderness of Sin. Before, it was the desert of Etham—hard gravelly soil; now, the wilderness of Sin—thorns and briers. Can we feel surprised that the thorns should occasionally tear and prick us? Happy is he, who, when meeting with thorns on his

path, first, penitentially calls to mind his sins, and humbles and abases himself on account of them ; and secondly, remembers the thorns with which our Redeemer was crowned, when he became a curse for us, " that we might be redeemed by him from the curse of the law ;" who thankfully receives every blessing as merited for him by his Saviour, and who really regards this world as a wilderness of Sin, in which he girds up the loins of his mind, that the thorns may not tear his garments, nor delay his progress, and hopes to the end for the grace that shall be revealed to him at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Let us be like those who are passing through a waste-howling wilderness, and who seek a better country.

Let us now attend to the interpretation of the word Alush. It means to knead or leaven. After the rough usage in Dophkah, we might have supposed the next would have been a more agreeable station ; but your own judgment will decide, whether the being kneaded is any thing pleasant. It is, however, necessary and useful, since it serves to bind the whole mass completely together, to make it pliant and plastic, to cause it to cleave firmly together, so that the leaven equally pervades the mass in every part. Without this process, one part would be too moist, another too dry ; the one be leavened and rise too much, the other too little. The word is also rendered by a mass of people.

We must here consider the children of Israel as the dough, in which leaven, or a principle of life, has been introduced from some other quarter, which must pervade the whole mass, whilst the latter must be kneaded, and, by this process, amalgamate closely with itself, and with the vital principle ; thus becoming fitted to

receive the form and figure designed to be given to it, without crumbling into pieces.

We know that in Scripture the term leaven is used in a two-fold sense. It has partly an evil signification, when it is said, "purge out the old leaven." This old leaven has reference more particularly to original sin, innate corruption—that inward motive and source of all evil, which manifests itself in the flowers of evil thoughts, inclinations, and desires, in the leaves of evil words and gestures, and in the fruit of evil actions. This leaven so penetrates the whole mass of human nature, that Paul says, "In my flesh dwelleth no good thing;" and Isaiah, "from the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness." How this leaven is to be expelled from us is the question; and yet it must be done. Christ says, "make the tree good:" this must precede; "the fruit will then be good." But Paul says, "Be a leaven of sincerity and truth." The thing is not accomplished by a grave external deportment, however laudable and estimable that may be in other respects. "Old things must pass away; all things must become new."

But how, and by what means, is this evil principle eradicated from human nature? Human efforts cannot accomplish it; it is effected by regeneration. Even as original evil pervades us by means of our natural birth, so must the opposite principle be imparted to us by a birth from God. That which is by this means infused into the heart is called Spirit, even as the former is termed flesh. But we may take a still higher standing and say, that Christ himself, as the new principle of life, must be born in us; and then also, as Paul writes to the Galatians, "be formed in us;" so that we be-

come perfectly amalgamated with him, and he more and more completely pervade, shine through, operate in, and live through our whole being, and, according to his promise and his prayer, become one with us, and we with him, so as to be perfect in one. (John xvii. 23.)

There are also a variety of amalgamations in their several stages of good and evil. We have already mentioned the worst, which is, that our nature and sin are so kneaded together, as to form but one mass; so that sin is even termed in Scripture, "the old man." And how dreadful is it to think at the same time, that Satan carries on his work in the children of disobedience, which all men are by nature! Besides this, how easily does a mass or crowd of people assemble in defence of vanity and sin!

The christian church also encamps at Alush in an evil sense, when persons of all descriptions join themselves to it, induced by temporal advantage, which they expect to reap from it, and, with their unrenewed hearts, bring with them heathenish vices. This is a disease from which we still suffer. If we look at the mass of those who call themselves Christians, what do we see but a rude, perverse, ignorant, unbelieving, and disobedient multitude, differing very little from the heathen in their manner, or even inferior to them; for, with the exception of gross idolatry, and that which is immediately connected with it, where is the heathenish vice which is not practised by Christians? Thus it ought not to be; but every one that names the name of Christ ought to depart from all iniquity.

The truths that are preached also, suffer a similar decline, since human wit and ordinances of men are

so mingled with them, that congregations and their preachers will no longer hear sound doctrine, but take an open and decisive part against it.

There are also individuals, who amalgamate the service of God and the world, and seek to serve these two irreconcilable masters at the same time. They halt between two opinions, receive as much from religion as suits their purpose, and as much of the world as pleases them. One doctrine they accept, another they reject; obey one command, and refuse obedience to another. These are amalgamations, and this is an Alush, where the true Christian will not be found lingering.

Those amalgamations are also to be dreaded, in which men mingle their own wisdom, or rather their folly, with the wisdom of God; and their chaff with the pure wheat of the divine Word; as likewise that lukewarmness, which Christ expressly reproves in the angel of the church of Laodicea, in which the individual is neither cold nor hot, but a mixture of both. Law and gospel are there mingled together; free-will and grace, and an empty, plausible tolerance, which leaves every one to believe what he pleases, with the exception of the vivifying truths of the gospel.

But there are many well-disposed and pious individuals, who show that they have not yet been at Alush, nor hitherto duly kneaded and compounded. In some, a premature and fleshy zeal manifests itself, which seeks, as it were by compulsion, to instruct and convert others. Thus the disciples wished fire to fall from heaven on the Samaritans. In others, some particular tenet holds too prominent a part, and forms something heterogeneous. Some will only hear of sanctification, others only of justification; some of duties, others of

human inabilities; some are so spiritual as to fall into a contempt of the preaching of the divine Word, and the holy sacraments; others, again, cling too closely to the letter. Many have such a strict self-selected form, that they reject every thing which does not fit into it, use a particular mode of speech, and feel a dislike to every other, though it may express the same thing; whilst, at the same time, they incessantly bring up some particular doctrine, even if it be only for the purpose of dispute. In short, truths are often rent asunder which belong together: too much importance is attached to one, too little to another; which is not therefore as it ought to be. They are like a mass which is not yet kneaded, and is therefore not brought to the same consistency in all its parts. Such characters must one day encamp at Alush, to be properly kneaded, and the case will then be very different with them.

Let us also make a few observations on this subject, with respect to that which is good and needful in it.

And we remark, first, that no genuine Christian rests satisfied with the first commencements of religion. He does not think himself to have attained to the whole of what may be experienced, when he has had some little insight afforded him into his corruption, and into the truths of salvation. This does not satisfy him, nor does he immediately think "this is all." Certain, however, it is, that a new convert, particularly when his repentance has been deep, and the consolation and assurance of the forgiveness of sins has been very powerfully and pervadingly experienced, may probably imagine that he has escaped every thing. But this state may be compared with the loud exultation at Rameses, which is only the first station, and is succeeded by thirty-nine

others, and lastly by Jordan, the stream of judgment. It is much better for such a one to think meanly of himself. Such a sentiment will be found useful. Believe sincerely that thou art as yet little or nothing; that thy views and experience are still very insignificant; and that the work must still be much deepened; if not, thou wilt grossly err, even as those do, who suppose they are something, without being able to add, with Paul, "By the grace of God." The Corinthians were full, and the Laodiceans said, "We are rich." But Jesus reproves the latter, and his Apostle the former.

We are, so to speak, a mass of meal, which figure our Lord employs when speaking of the kingdom of God. In order to make this meal edible, the woman—that is, the Holy Spirit, this mother of all the children that are born of God—must put a little leaven into it, until the whole mass be leavened; on which account it must be kneaded together with it. This leaven is Christ himself, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption," who is light, life, and truth—who is all to us. A real marriage and union must take place between him and our souls, which commences in conversion, is continued in sanctification, and completed in glorification. When an individual, through the mercy of God, in the power of the Holy Ghost, has attained to this union with Christ, Paul justly says, "We possess a treasure, although in earthen vessels." The soul thus becomes a partaker of Christ, has passed from death unto life, is rich, yea, perfect in him; or, as Paul says, is become one spirit with him, being planted together with him: and he then points out the inestimable fellowship with Christ in his

suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. Rom. vi.

Yet still, this great Apostle says, "Not as if I had already attained," and desires to know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, that he may become conformable to his death, and attain to the resurrection of the dead. (Phil. iii. 10 and 11.) With Christ, a light has entered into the soul; but this light must increasingly pervade it, until it becomes light in the Lord. A life has entered into the soul, which life must penetrate it more and more, so that the individual may be able to say, "Now I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Wisdom is in such a character; but he must be more and more filled by it, so that it may be said of him, "Ye know all things, for ye have the unction of the Holy One." Perfection is in him, and all ought to come to the same faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and become perfect men, according to the measure of the perfect stature of Christ, and grow up in all things unto him who is the head, even Christ. The Lord speaks of the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood, signifying thereby the closest union of the soul with him, from whence the most blissful consequences must necessarily result.

This is, therefore, the object and the aim; it points us to something excellent. But what a path that is, which leads to this aim! The idea of kneading does not indicate any thing agreeable to nature, even as the thing itself is no easy work. Thus the children of Israel were obliged to tread and knead the clay, when compelled to make bricks. But now they were, so to speak, themselves the clay, and obliged to let themselves be

kneaded and trodden upon. What must have been their feelings? Just about to form their encampment and retire to rest, when the cloudy pillar rises and compels them to depart again, perhaps even at midnight, in order to settle at some place a few miles further off. Now they are in want of bread, and then again of water. God says, by the prophet Isaiah, (chap. xli. 25) "I have raised up one from the north—he shall call upon my name; and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay." What else does this mean, than that he will humble them, to show them that they are of nothing, and that their work is vanity, as it is said in the immediate context. Ezekiel says still more expressively, "Remove the diadem, and take off the crown; exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn it, and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is, and I will give it to him," (chap. xxi. 25—27.)

By the process of kneading, the whole mass becomes closely compacted with itself and with the leaven, thus forming a whole, whilst losing its own natural quality and assuming a different one. Thus all true Christians are one body, of which Christ is the head. One spirit animates them all, proceeding from Christ into them. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in you all." Self must be more and more put away, in order to make room for Christ, that it may be said, "Not I, but Christ in me." Love must surround all as with a firm bond, and all that is discordant fall away more and more, until we become, as the primitive believers at Jerusalem, one heart and one soul. But the soul must, in particular, become more and more closely

united to Christ, and cleave to him by faith ; and he that is thus joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Certainly, a thorough kneading is requisite before self be completely trodden down, and love gain the pre-eminence. Yet it is even now visible amongst true Christians, however defectively exhibited.

But woe unto those, who, as obstinately impenitent, fall under the awful feet of God, so that he passes over them as on clay, and as enemies, who are made his footstool ! Whilst, blessed are they, who are so kneaded with the leaven of sincerity and truth, as to become inseparably united, as a new mass, with Christ and his church, into one whole. Then, if their path be strange, its end will be glorious. Eventually, sorrow and sighing must flee away ; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.

XIII.

REPHIDIM.

NUMB. xxxiii. 14.

“And they removed from Alush, and encamped at Rephidim, where was no water for the people to drink.”

THE narrative is short but pleasing, which is related to us in Genesis viii. and ix. respecting the subsiding of the deluge. The ark at length rested on Mount Ararat, and the tops of the mountains again towered above the waters, which gradually subsided. Noah was now desirous of knowing what appearance the earth presented, and let fly a raven. This unclean bird, happy in having escaped from the ark, returned not again, since it found sufficient suitable food for itself—an emblem of all impure minds, whose desires seek satisfaction out of the sphere of religion, and have no attachment to the heavenly Noah. He then sent forth a dove. It flew far about, but found no rest for the sole of its foot. It returned to the ark, and fluttered around it, till Noah compassionately stretched out his hand, and took it to him into the ark.

Noah received the dove into the ark. This the heavenly Noah also does completely, when he takes

the believing soul through death to himself in heaven, where it rests from its labours. But even here below, he occasionally manifests himself thus gracious to his people. Sometimes indeed, they are obliged to leave the ark, but their longing and desire is towards it, and they find no rest out of it. The wings they use are these desires and this longing, and Jesus comes to their aid by stretching out his hand, and taking them to him in the ark.

Thus there are pleasing resting places, even in the desert of this life, and of this kind was in some respects the tenth encampment of the children of Israel, on which we shall now make a few observations.

They removed from Alush, and encamped in Rephidim, where the people had no water to drink. If the two preceding stations offered little that was remarkable, so that we were obliged to adhere solely to the meaning of the words, for the purpose of deriving instruction and edification—the present contains so much of what is worthy of observation, that the whole of the seventeenth chapter of Exodus is filled with it; and the occurrences at Rephidim are frequently adverted to in Scripture.*

This station had three names; for it is also called Massa and Meribah. We will first mention something respecting this place of encampment, and then of that which occurred there.

We already know, that this tenth station inclined towards Canaan, and that the deviation from the direct road terminated at Alush. Its locality was not disagreeable; since, first, it was something pleasant to

* See Psalms lxxviii. xcv. cv. 1 Cor. x. Heb. iii.

have left the wilderness of Sin, the thorny desert behind them. In religion there are single and particular temptations, which might torment Christians almost to death, and of which, with all their endeavours, they cannot rid themselves nor resign themselves to them, as if they were so ordered of Providence. Such a one then sees no way of escape, and thinks he shall never come forth from this thorny desert all his life, and believes that if he were once delivered from it, every thing else would be a trifle to him. And lo! he at length escapes from it, and cannot recall to mind without horror, what befell him in Dophkah and Alush.

It was, secondly, a valley surrounded by hills. Valleys, indeed, are not without their difficulties, both in descending and ascending. Scripture as well as experience tells us of a vale of tears—yea, and of the valley of the shadow of death—appellations, which excite nothing but apprehension. There is also a valley of humility, and he who understands how to walk in it, takes pretty equal steps. Into this vale every one must enter, who travels to Canaan. He becomes humble, and the longer the more so, and to such the Lord gives grace. True humility arises from a thorough conviction of our nothingness and sinfulness. It is by no means any thing assumed or external, but something real; so that a truly humble man does not regard himself as humble, and knows not how to think otherwise of himself than very meanly. Nay, the really humble man regards himself as nothing—even as we all are in reality, until the Lord graciously makes something of us—and is well satisfied to be so. But acting and speaking humbly do not constitute the matter, and such hypocritically humble people would probably be

not a little vexed if they were told, that they had no reason to think otherwise than meanly of themselves.

As long as Christ is not become all to us, as for instance when he says, “without me ye can do nothing”—as long as we cannot say with Paul, “I am the chief of sinners, I am an untimely birth, a fool, and nothing”—we have no reason to regard ourselves as humble. Nor will it scarcely ever be the case, that a person becomes humble, until he has been beaten at Dophkah, and kneaded and trodden upon at Alush. The man must come down from the height of his own knowledge, ability, and self-love, into the poor-house, where he must depend upon gifts for his whole subsistence, receiving sometimes sparingly, at others abundantly, and sometimes be content with bread and water, or even be obliged to hunger and thirst a little, or perhaps experience some harsh treatment, according as it may please the prudent overseer of heavenly blessings. Let us therefore all become more vile in our own eyes. Let us regard ourselves as still greater, more abominable and worthless sinners than before ; and for this we have very great reason ; let us no longer regard our errors as such trifling matters, and skip over them so easily as many are inclined to do ; let us learn and believe more thoroughly, that out of Christ we understand nothing and can do nothing, and more thoroughly learn to believe, that his offering alone renders us acceptable.

Rephidim was, thirdly, a very pleasant valley ; or, at least, is so at present. Persons who have travelled in that country, assert, that there is a convent there, the solitary inhabitants of which possess very beautiful gardens, and that palm-trees were particularly nu-

merous there, whose refreshing fruit in the midst of a horrible wilderness must have been the more welcome to travellers, the less they expected to meet with it. What an agreeable surprise must this have been to the children of Israel, to find here a second Elim! David sings, "Thou preparest a table for me in the presence of mine enemies." The followers of Christ do not always enjoy abundance, neither are they always scantily supplied. And even as it is in temporal things, so likewise in those that are spiritual. Read the Psalms, and observe how widely different are their contents. One Psalm utters the voice of mourning and lamentation, in such a manner as to render it dubious whether the Psalmist would ever recover a cheerful tone. He wrestles with God, seeks to encourage himself, begs and prays, and urges God to awake, as if he had fallen asleep; and to arise, as if he were sitting idle. Another exults and rejoices as if every thing were overcome, boasts of the Psalmist's innocence, piety, and righteousness, as if they were spotless, so that one would be induced to think, he would never be moved, so firmly does his mountain stand, through the Lord's good pleasure. And this is also the history of individual Christians. The Lord often prevents us with his goodness before we are aware. The contrite heart often finds in the midst of the desert, a Rephidim, a pleasure-ground, and refreshing fruits, and is unexpectedly comforted in the most pleasing manner, whilst still believing himself very far from any consolation.

This valley had several names. First, it was called Rephidim. This word is translated in more ways than one. Its primary meaning is a resting place, or couch

of repose—a desirable thing for a weary traveller, if the spot on which he rests is only of the right kind. Jesus offers the true resting place to the weary and heavy laden, when he exclaims, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light!” It is reserved for him alone to bestow upon us the invaluable blessing of real rest of soul, which arises from the perfect satisfaction of every desire, and which is to be found in him alone. He that drinks of the water of visible and sensible enjoyments will thirst again. And this has not merely reference to the present inferior state of existence, but with respect to the future also; the individual deceives himself, who founds his hopes for the latter, on that which he himself is, knows, has, or is able to perform—all which is nothing but sand, and unfit to serve as a foundation. If any one is trusting to his own heart, the Scriptures declare such a one to be a fool, and blind; not knowing that he is poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked. Some seek to tranquillize themselves with the mercy of God, which is certainly an important ground of consolation. But is it not shaken by the consideration, that God is equally as undeniably righteous and holy, as merciful and gracious, and that he threatens us, as well as speaks kindly to us? The assurances we may have received of divine grace, really imparted, and the forgiveness of sins, are something very precious; but they afford as little permanent solace as other occasional consolations and pleasing emotions, although it is certainly said, “Forget not all his benefits.” But whoever became a partaker of these through grace, and yet was ignorant that the most impressive assurances

may be again so obscured and contested, that they appear to the soul like a dream and a delusion, or at least, are incapable of fully satisfying the mind, although the individual may derive a certain degree of courage to persevere in the ways of the Lord from the recollection of them?

True rest is solely to be found in the precious name of Jesus; in that which he is in himself, which he is to us, and what he has done and still does for such wretched creatures as we. In particular, it is his eternally valid sacrifice on the cross, by which he has for ever perfected them that are sanctified, that presents a complete ground of consolation, even for the poorest sinner. He is made of God unto us wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption. And is not every thing included in this, which is needful and salutary for us? And is it not something extremely desirable, that all is contained in one, and that we do not need therefore to seek for one thing here and another there, but meet with it all combined in one?

As soon as the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the blind to see this, and the ears of the deaf to hear it, they find themselves as in a pleasant vale, or on a downy couch, on which they can lie down, refresh their weary limbs, and sleep in peace, even if, according to the third Psalm, tens of thousands should set themselves against them. This is a sleep, in which the heart waketh, and from which the Beloved will not have the soul awakened. All the powers of the soul are then lulled into a pleasing serenity. The heart is no longer like a troubled sea, but like a placid mirror, in which the sky reflects itself. Anxious cares have been compelled to flee, and are cast upon him who so

faithfully and pastorally cares for us. The individual no longer needs to look with apprehension at himself, but has blissfully lost sight of himself, whilst looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of his faith; and has no occasion to be disturbed any longer about himself, as previously, without accomplishing any thing more by it than wearying himself more and more in the multitude of his ways. He need do nothing himself, but only enjoy the fruit of that which He procured for us, who long ago pleaded our cause successfully before the judgment seat. His commandments are no longer grievous to such an individual, and whilst learning of him, he finds him meek and lowly in heart, his yoke easy, and his burden light. The six long working days have then elapsed, and the Sabbath morning dawns of which it is said, "In it ye shall do no work, but learn that I am the Lord that sanctifieth you." The Lord then girds himself, and proves that he is not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and acts as a shepherd, who leads his sheep into green pastures, and by the still waters.

Ah, who does not heartily rejoice, that the poor Israelites have at length reached such a pleasant valley as that of Rephidim! Doubtless, they did not pass through the wilderness of Sin, without tearing their shoes and clothes, and lacerating their hands and feet. Repose therefore a while here. Eat, O friends! and drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved! Delight yourselves with them, ye weary and exhausted pilgrims. A little further up-hill, and soon your toils will terminate. A Sabbath succeeds such days of labour, and repose after fatigue, which is so much the more refreshing, the longer and more painful was the latter. "Cast

not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." Jesus is the true Noah and gives us rest; he will at length put forth his hand, and take the fluttering dove, which found no rest for the sole of her foot, to him into the ark.

But Rephidim may be also translated, slack hands, and their cure. Slack hands are such, as being tired of working, throw it aside and give it up. So the Israelites were tired of the journey, and vexed at having suffered themselves to be led out of Egypt. When the Scriptures exhort us to strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees, it presupposes that such a temptation may befall a Christian. A despondency may seize upon him in such a manner, as to cause him to think of giving up all, because it appears to be in vain. A person may in the same manner imagine he might as well cease to pray, since it is all unavailing; and weary of the conflict, he is ready to throw away his weapons. This despondency is an evil thing, and hence it is expressly enjoined, to say to them that are of a fearful heart, "be strong!" "Ye have need of patience, that after having done the will of God, ye may receive the promise." We must learn unweariedly to wait for the Lord and his aid, and though it tarry, still it is said, "Wait for him, for the Lord will surely come, and will not tarry." We must always prepare ourselves anew for the conflict, and redouble our courage at every obstacle.

But it is pleasing that Rephidim not only means weak hands, but may also have reference to their cure. They are healed, when the Holy Spirit vouchsafes to the soul his powerful influences, and comforts the individual, who then runs in the way of his command-

ments. Renewed strength is promised to them that wait upon the Lord, and he is represented as one who giveth power to the weak, and to such as have no might. When the spirit again obtains a sight of all we possess in Christ, faith is again invigorated. It is much to be lamented, though not of unfrequent occurrence, when Christians are deserving of the same reproach as the Galatians, "Ye did run well, who hath hindered you?" and when Jesus also complains, "Thou hast left thy first love," and adds, "remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." It is grievous to see Christians gradually ensnared and entangled in worldly affairs and pursuits, so that any considerable difference is scarcely perceptible between them and such as are entirely men of the world. Such individuals have every reason strongly to doubt whether a genuine work of grace was ever begun in them, and whether it would not be much more advisable for them seriously to seek the grace of the first repentance, instead of solacing themselves with the perseverance of the saints, and earnestly to work out their salvation, instead of imagining that Jesus has accomplished it for them, and thus spend their lives in such an inanimate manner, which is a gross mistake and abuse of divine grace. If our knowledge be what it ought, it will make us, that we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful, but manifest its powerful operation in us. Those that mourn over their barrenness and unfruitfulness, and are urged by it to take refuge with the Lord and in the means of grace, are of a different class, and must not be confounded with the former. Let them remember Moses, whose hands were held up by Aaron and Hur, when they grew weary, and the promise, "I will pour

water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground."

The conduct of the children of Israel caused two disgraceful epithets to be given to Rephidim—Massa and Meribah, which signify temptation and contention. The poor people had just escaped from the thorny desert, and were probably very glad of it. But now they were in want of something which was indispensable, and that was water. Rephidim could not, therefore, have been at that time the pleasant spot which modern travellers describe it to be; or else it first became so in consequence of the smitten rock. They were in want of water, and yet their route was beyond all doubt not their own choosing, but the Lord's express arranging; notwithstanding which they suffered such a privation! Have you ever felt the want of it when thirsty? I do not mean natural water, of which we are not so easily deprived, but spiritual water. Or is this as strange a thing to you as it was to the Samaritan woman? David thirsted after God, as the hart for the water brooks. His soul was once in such a state of spiritual drought, that it was like a dry land in the heat of summer. We find the prophet speaking of the needy, who seek water and find none, and whose tongue faileth for thirst. But the Lord says, "I will hear them, I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them."

However, the children of Israel were destitute of that water which is requisite for the life of the body, as is the water of the Holy Spirit for spiritual and eternal life. But why did God suffer them thus to want, and to feel it in such a sensible manner? Because he is a God doing wonders, who sometimes leads his people in one way, and sometimes in another—because they were

again to be thoroughly convinced how indescribably needful he was to them, and how dependant they were upon him—because they were to despair the more deeply of themselves and of every other creature, and place their hopes more exclusively in him—because they were to be excited to call upon God as out of a deep abyss—because they were to perceive how God could act with them if he pleased, and therefore learn to fear him—and also because an opportunity might be afforded him of gloriously delivering them, and of manifesting himself in his marvellous excellency. These were doubtless some of the objects designed by the Lord in his providence on this occasion.

But how did the people conduct themselves in their distress? Very improperly, and the evil human heart showed itself in its perverseness; so that we may see in them, of what we ourselves are capable, if the good Spirit of God does not lead us in a plain path. They contended with Moses. They reproached him for the great act of kindness he had shown them in serving as the divine instrument of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, and told him he ought rather to have left them there, than have plunged them into such distress as was more painful to them than all Egyptian oppression. Filled with wrath, they demand of him an impossibility: he must give them water. But what can Moses—what can the law give to a languishing soul? How vainly does the latter apply to one that has not a single commandment that can quicken! And yet we always first of all apply to him, who nevertheless points out a prophet, whose shoe's latchet he is not worthy to unloose. Ah, how easily do we forsake the fountain of living waters, and turn to the broken cisterns, that can

hold no water! They, at the same time, demanded water of him with such anger and violence, that they appeared as if they would stone him if he did not immediately comply with their request. Thus man becomes like a savage beast, when his passions once awake.

They were not, however, content with murmuring against Moses, but they even outraged God himself, by saying, "Is God with us or not?" This inquiry was not made from trouble of heart, like the question put by Gideon, "If the Lord be with us, why has all this happened to us?" nor because they felt a dejecting doubt upon the subject, whether he was with them, or whether they had not caused him to turn from them by their sins. Of this they had no idea. On the contrary, they were full of their own righteousness, and thought God was bound to help them, but was perhaps unable. Thus their descendants required a sign from heaven—not as if Jesus were able to give them one, but rather that they might have an additional pretence for their unbelief. And there is much of this defying of God amongst men. They require that he should accommodate himself to their views and wishes; if not, they think themselves justified in not troubling themselves about him, and mock at prayer and confidence in him, as if there were no God. First acknowledge your sin and unworthiness, and then learn to cry unto God from the depths of your wretchedness, and he will in due time make it apparent, that he is a very present help in trouble.

Thus lamentably, sinfully, and culpably, did the people act. And thus acts, generally speaking, the natural man. Moses alone conducted himself, in this trying

season, as became a Christian. Meekly and patiently he listened to the insults of the people, nor gave way to anger. He did not despair of divine assistance in this extremity, from which he saw no natural means of deliverance. He had the confidence in God that he was able to help in this time of need, and would help according to his great goodness, notwithstanding the people were unworthy of it. He elevated his looks beyond the things that are seen, and adhered to him who is invisible as if he saw him. He turned with his whole burden unto the Lord, and besought his aid. He *cried* to the Lord, it is said, to intimate the urgency and fervency of his prayer.

This was as it ought to be. If any one is in distress, let him do so likewise. Where else are we, spiritually, but in a desert? And what do we require more than the water which flows from the rock, Christ; by which the desert is transmuted into a Rephidim and a garden; but without which, it bears only such thorns as those we perceive in the Jews, and in ourselves. For this water let us cry with Moses.

The Lord sent aid; the nature of which we will consider in the sequel. God is the refuge of his people, and has pity upon his heritage. "Thou sendest a gracious rain, whereby thou refreshest thine inheritance when it is weary."

XIV.

THE ROCK SMITTEN.

Exod. xvii. 4—6.

“ And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, What shall I do unto this people, they be almost ready to stone me.

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel, and thy rod wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand and go ;

“ Behold I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb ; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.”

How pleasing is the promise in Hosea xiv. 5 : “ I will be as the dew unto Israel, he shall grow as the lily.”

Dew is something precious in the natural world, and a blessing to vegetation ; it even contains a salutary power for the invigoration of the human frame, and especially for weak eyes. It is a pleasing figure, which the Lord here makes use of, in promising to be himself as a salutary dew to his people. How it will refresh them, how they will be beautified by it ! For how sumptuously is nature adorned, when the rising sun reflects itself in the dew—when every thing presents the appearance of being spangled with pearls and dia-

monds ! Thus beautifully does the Lord also occasionally adorn his church.

This flourishing state is described in the words—“grow as the lily.” If we consider a lily in its full expansion, it presents certainly an admirable and splendid appearance. But in order to witness this, we must not approach it in the winter season ; the lily then looks deplorable ; it has become invisible, and withdraws itself entirely into the earth, so that its place is scarcely to be found.

In order, therefore, that Israel may grow as the lily, it requires the dews of heaven to cause him to spring up and flourish.

We have already considered the want of water which the Israelites experienced at Rephidim. It was urgent and great ; nothing could supply its place ; and that which they wanted they must necessarily have. The supply of this want is recorded in our text, and the mode of affording it.

The Israelites acted correctly in applying to Moses, the mediator of the old covenant, by whose hand, according to the divine dispensation, they always received their aid, even as we do by Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant. But they applied to him in an improper manner, with murmurs and menaces, and sinned in such a way that God swore in his wrath they should not enter into his rest.

However, the Lord sent aid, and that in the following manner. At Rephidim there was a rock called Horeb, which signifies dry. This dry rock God pointed out to Moses, as the medium by which the want of water was to be supplied. It required no little faith to believe

that such an effect could be produced by such a means, of which neither the name nor the nature of the instrument gave any hope. There were, however, two things by which his faith might be strengthened: first, the Lord's standing upon it—"I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb;" by which the Lord placed himself in connection with this rock, from whence indeed wonders might be expected, of which it was otherwise incapable.

The other means of encouragement was the rod with which he had divided the sea, and which he was to take in his hand. This rod was a very suitable thing to remind him of the power of God, to which nothing is impossible. In other respects he was compelled to take his reason captive under the obedience of faith, to hope, with Abraham, where nothing was to be hoped for, and to trust in him, who can command that which is not, into existence.

How shall water flow from a dry and solid rock? Some of the elders were obliged to accompany Moses, to be witnesses of that which was about to take place: he then smote the rock with his rod, and an abundance of water gushed out. "He opened the rock," it is said in Psalm cv. 41, "and the waters gushed out; they ran in the dry places like a river."

Thus Israel's thirst was miraculously quenched. Travellers assert that this valley is very dry. The traces of the miracle of which we are speaking are still in existence: in the midst of the valley is an immense mass of red granite; its height and breadth are twelve, and its whole circumference fifty feet. Towards Mount Horeb it is broad; but in other respects of a round appearance. Twenty-four openings are visible in it, each

a foot deep and an inch broad : twelve of these openings are towards Mount Horeb, and the rest on the opposite side. Moss is still seen on them, as a sign that water formerly flowed out of them. The water was doubtless the cause that pleasant gardens and fruit trees are found in this valley to the present day, as we have already observed.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this event in a very remarkable manner, in 1 Cor. x. 4, where he says,—“They did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ.” They drank, however, manifestly, natural and elementary water, even as they had a natural and bodily thirst; yet Paul calls it a spiritual drink. The rock, as is evident to this day, was a natural rock—an immense mass of red granite. But Paul calls it a spiritual rock; and when he adds, “which followed them” it might be inferred that the rock was not fixed in one place, but had moved along with the host; yet we see from the Psalms, that it was not the rock itself, but the water which flowed out of it which accompanied them everywhere where they would otherwise have had no water.

God performed here a great miracle, in which he glorified his power and goodness towards such an unthankful race. But the observation of the Apostle directs us to a mystery which is concealed here: it was certainly a natural rock, but it typified Christ as the spiritual rock; and when the Apostle says, “that rock was Christ,” it is as if he had said, that rock signified Christ. It was a natural element of which the Israelites drank; yet Paul calls it spiritual, because it was a representation of the blessings and merits of Jesus

Christ. It is not to be supposed that the people generally saw any thing more than a natural rock and natural water; for, thirty-nine years afterwards, Moses said, "Unto this day, the Lord has not given thee the hearing ear, the seeing eye, and the understanding heart." Therefore, how could they comprehend the mystery contained in the rock?

Christ was certainly then, as previously, the rock on which every thing is founded, and from which life proceeds; although at that time he was only recognized as such, in a confused manner, according to Old Testament obscurity. Moses also testified of Christ. Let us therefore consider him under the figure now held up to our view, as a smitten rock, from which streams of water proceed, communicating life and refreshment in the midst of a barren waste.

Even in ancient times, a rock was considered as an emblem of deity. "He is a rock," says Moses, Deut. xxxii. 4. It is also an image of durability and immutability, attributes which belong to the being of God; on which account it is said, "The *mountains* may depart, and the *hills* be removed;" but not the *rocks*. How immoveable are they! whether elevating themselves in the midst of the sea, and enduring all the fury of its raging billows, and even occasionally covered by them, yet they stand firm and never tremble, whilst the sea must sink down and collect itself again at their feet. If it were not such a liquid element, it would be only the more forcibly shattered, the greater the violence with which it burst upon them. This is all imagery which may easily be applied to the divine Being and his attributes, and in particular to Christ.

Rocks are suitable for security and habitation; as

also for building upon, and for affording a cooling shade. And how all this is met with, spiritually, in perfection in Christ! Does any one need and desire security against the wrath of God, and the equally dreadful curse of the law, which he has merited by his sins—security against the subtle attacks of Satan, or his fiery darts—security against the artful temptations of that dangerous foe, our own heart—security against those nameless and innumerable perils which menace us on every hand—this rock presents it in the most perfect manner. Hence David calls God his rock and his fortress. “Let not your hearts be troubled,” says Christ, “you believe in God, believe also in me;” but learn thoroughly to know your insecurity out of Christ, that you may seek your security in this rock.

Rocks serve also, with the caves which are often met with in them, as dwelling-places, not only for wild beasts, but also, as it is said in Solomon’s Song, for doves and bees. Did not David frequently take shelter in the caves of rocks when fleeing from Saul? But Paul seeks to be found in Christ: he invites and enjoins us to abide in him; and there alone can we be safe from the ambuscades of our spiritual enemies. They that thus dwell in the secret places of the Most High, and abide under his shadow, are able to say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in him will I trust,” (Psalm xci. 2); and if we are desirous of knowing the privileges enjoyed by those who have thus made the Lord their dwelling-place, and the Most High their habitation, we have only to peruse the remainder of that beautiful Psalm, which places them before us in such a striking manner.

What is more suitable also for a foundation, even of

the largest palaces, than a rock? But other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. A common foundation only imparts its stability to the edifice which is duly erected upon it; but the rock, Christ, imparts to the soul that is built upon it, whose former edifice had fallen to ruins, by that true faith through which it is united to him in the spirit of Jesus Christ—not only durability, but also much besides. This foundation is called wisdom, because it makes wise; and righteousness, because it renders righteous; and sanctification, because it imparts holiness; and redemption, because it delivers from all evil, and bestows all that is good. Even as a building rests with its whole weight on its foundation, so the believing soul, with all its necessities, and with all its hope and confidence, rests upon Christ. How soon every thing falls away which is not founded upon Jesus! “Be ye rooted and built up in him,” says Paul. Let every one take heed what he builds, and whether he is founded upon Christ in truth and reality. If this is the case, there is no danger; every thing will go on prosperously under the Lord’s guidance.

Rocks afford a cool and refreshing shade, which is so agreeable in the oppressive heat. There is a furnace of affliction, a fire of temptation, and a seared conscience; but the name of the Lord is like a cooling shade.

This rock stood in the barren wilderness. From whence could help be less expected, than from such a rock; and yet it afforded it abundantly. Christ is also compared to a root which shoots forth out of a dry ground. He appeared in the midst of a spiritual desert, which was intended, through him, to attain

a very different aspect, even fruitfulness and life. All salvation was to proceed from him, and it flowed in rich streams to all who hungered and thirsted after it; so that the wilderness and solitary place were glad, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose. There is salvation in no other; neither is there any other name given amongst men whereby we can be saved.

But in order that the rock might yield water, and by this means afford refreshment, deliverance from death, and life to the languishing Israelites, it was necessary that it should be smitten by Moses. And was not Christ wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities? The chastisement was inflicted upon him that we might have peace. Was he not smitten by those who sat in Moses' seat, in the presence, not merely of the elders, but of the whole Sanhedrim, with no more leniency than if he had been an insensible rock, and the vilest of sinners, and yet all according to the divine counsel?

The Lord stood upon the rock, and thus indicated the one which he meant. Christ is appointed of God to be our High-priest and Mediator: he is made of God unto us. It was his good pleasure, that in Christ, all fulness should dwell, and that no man should come to the Father but by him. To him is given all power in heaven and on earth. We are referred to him entirely, with all our concerns, and to him alone. Hence it is said, "Believe on him, and ye shall be saved." The Lord stood upon the rock, and "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."

In consequence of the smiting of the rock, such an abundance of water gushed out, that man and beast quenched their thirst, and the barren desert was changed

into a pleasant garden—a figure of the glorious fruits of the atoning sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. Pure and purifying water flowed in streams; and the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from all sin. By it that peace is imparted which passeth knowledge. The distress which had risen to its height, without any human means even of alleviating it, much less of removing it, is a striking figure, not only of our misery and wretchedness, and the state of utter helplessness into which sin had plunged us, but also an image of what is really felt in repentance, and in subsequent temptations by individuals, in a manner no less oppressive, than the want of water was felt by the Israelites in this barren desert, who saw nothing but destruction before them, and thus were in the extremity of distress, and driven to the borders of despair. But however great the extremity was—how entirely was it removed by a single blow at the rock! How did the languishing multitudes drink in the flowing stream! What a lamentation was probably afterwards heard in the camp at their murmuring, their unbelief, and their rebellious inquiry, “is the Lord with us or not?” What songs of praise then resounded! What ardent resolutions were then taken to trust in future, even in the most distressing circumstances, entirely in the Lord; never to give up courage again, patiently to submit to all his guidance, and much more of the same kind. This was, at least, their duty, and at the same time would prove their felicity. How sweet must the water have tasted to them, mingled with the tears of their gratitude and their repentance!

Such is also the case when living water from Christ, the fountain, is gratuitously given to a troubled and

distressed soul, and when the promise is fulfilled in its experience, "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." This causes peace in the conscience, and joy in the heart; this produces the lovely fruits of the Spirit, and opens the mouth to the praise of God. Then is realized what was spoken by the prophet Hosea, "I will be as the dew unto Israel, and he shall grow as the lily. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his perfume as Lebanon. I am like a green fir-tree, from me is thy fruit found." All who have been delivered from similar distresses, who have received the assurance of the forgiveness of sins and divine grace, and enjoy his consolations—give thanks and praise like David. It will be manifested in them, into what a paradise the streaming rock transmutes the barren Rephidim.

This rock was the only source from which water flowed; but it yielded it in sufficient abundance. Water now no longer streams from it, and the parched wanderer sees only with regret the twenty-four fissures, as so many mementos of its former abundant spring, now dried up. This can be by no means applied to Christ, who is the same to-day as yesterday. No; whoever is athirst, let him come; and whoever will, let him take of the water of life freely. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters!" It streams from so many apertures, and so abundantly, to quench thy thirst, to cleanse and renovate thee. And what will be thy feelings when thou art told to draw? The streams poured themselves out through the desert, and they flow down to us. The rock followed them.

Oh therefore, harden not your hearts as at Massa

and Meribah, when God swore in his wrath they should not enter into his rest, but listen to-day to his gracious voice! Know the gift of God, and who it is of whom we speak, and ask of him, and he will give you water to drink, so that you shall thirst no more, and which shall be in you a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

XV.

THE GIVING OF THE LAW.

NUMB. xxxiii. 15.

“ And they departed from Rephidim, and pitched in the wilderness of Sinai.”

IMPORTANT is the expression of the Apostle in Gal. iii. 10, where he says, “ As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse.” The Galatians, to whom he wrote, were converted, gifted, and believing Christians, who had previously caused the Apostle great joy; but they had fallen off in such a manner, as might eventually result in complete apostacy. This state of things deeply grieved the Apostle; and in what did the declension consist? Not in individual gross sins, nor in an indifference to truth and godliness, but rather in an improper zeal for them. It is difficult indeed to imagine that a person may err, not only by the actual transgression of the commandments, but also even by misguided zeal in the fulfilling of them. We should incline to think, that such a zeal was never culpable, still less pernicious and dangerous, but rather deserving of praise and encouragement: and that what

was improper in it would in time regulate itself. But Paul was of an entirely different opinion, and speaks of losing Christ, and falling from grace. For all that leads the individual away from Christ, and draws him to something else, is injurious to the soul, whatever name it may bear—the world, sin, or even virtue and amendment; as in the case of a sick person, every thing is prejudicial which hinders his recovery, were it even the most costly wine, or the most delicious fruit.

Paul here declares, that not only gross sinners, which is a matter of course, but even those who are of the works of the law, are under the curse. And who are the latter, but such as strive for salvation by their own works and doings? However great the value they may attach to their own efforts, the more they exert themselves the more do they lose sight of Christ, and are so far from attaining their object, that they continue under the curse; for it is written, cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

The continuance in all that is written in the book of the law, is therefore the requirement of the law, and nothing less than this is the condition on which salvation is attainable by this way.

Let him, therefore, who finds it impossible to fulfil these conditions, look out for some other way; and it is one great object of the law to accomplish this. May the Lord graciously bless to this end our present meditation!

Fifty days had elapsed since the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt. A short period, but so much had occurred in it, that we almost require a longer time to consider all these events, than they to experience them. These fifty days are very remarkable, and hence Whitsuntide or Pentecost has its name to this day, from this number. It is, however, remarkable, that from the fifteenth encampment at Rimmon Parez, to the thirty-second, which is called Kadesh, which comprehends a period of thirty-eight years, nothing is mentioned. If we have therefore been prolix hitherto, we shall be able to be the more concise in the consideration of those encampments.

We now depart from Rephidim, and according to the divine direction, take up our abode in the desert of Sinai, where Israel remained almost a whole year. It would occupy too much of our time, fully to consider every thing that occurred there; we will therefore not attempt it, but endeavour to be brief. For where should we find an end, were we to enter upon an elucidation of all the laws, ceremonies, and types—these shadowy figures, the body of which is Christ?

We break up, therefore, from Rephidim, because the fiery and cloudy pillar gives the signal, and remove. But whither? Whither else than into a desert; consequently, from one desert into another. But what will you say, when I observe, that it might be rendered, quite in accordance with the language of the Old Testament, from one school into another? for the word desert can be deduced from another, which signifies to instruct, and certain it is, that the Christian thus passes from one species of instruction into another. Whether he advances or retrogrades, and whether he

is more and more able or unable to do without his master, will subsequently appear. A desert, from its very nature and tracklessness, its destitution and insecurity, compels us to regard the power, goodness, and faithfulness of God.

The route continues to lead obliquely towards Canaan. Three stations more, and about as many leagues, and we may then enter the promised land, without any further difficulty, into that part of it which was allotted to Judah. Let us therefore most carefully beware of coming short of it.

With regard to the name of Sinai, it is synonymous with that of Sin, and signifies a thorn-bush or brier. Linguists translate this word also by radiance and nourishment. Of the former there was enough, but of the latter little. It contains also a great chain of mountains in which Horeb and Sinai are particularly prominent. Below, they form but one mountain; but higher up, they are divided into two summits; Sinai, however, is a third higher than Horeb. The access to the mountain is very difficult, and so to speak, impracticable; and is imposed by the monks who reside there, as a severe penance for heinous sins. Helena, the mother of the Emperor Constantine, caused a flight of steps to be made, which are now, however, fallen into decay; so that, in some places, they are no longer visible, although several thousand still exist. They are from one to two feet high, and are cut in the red granite of which the mountain is composed. A person must ascend rapidly in order to reach the summit in eight hours; from thence, an extensive prospect is enjoyed, the mountain itself being visible from a distance of six days' journey. Upon it there are some

springs of water which are never dry, and which abundantly supply with excellent water the convents which are built upon it, as well as the gardens of the monks, in which vegetables and fruit-trees flourish. In some parts, it is impossible to ascend the mountain by climbing, and it is necessary for that purpose to be drawn up by ropes. The summit is not visible, until the greatest part of the mountain has been ascended.

We have also to remark, that the name of this mountain terminates with an *i*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew language, which, as a numeral, signifies ten, the number of commandments, which the Lord gave upon this mountain. Jesus draws our attention to this letter, when he says, not one jot or tittle of the law shall fail, until all be fulfilled. How minutely also does James speak, when he declares those guilty of the whole law, who offend even but in one point, though they keep all the rest !

But let us now proceed to the consideration of that which took place in the desert, and particularly on Mount Sinai. In the giving of the law, there was a majestic manifestation of the holiness of God, chiefly with the intention of placing the necessity of a mediator and the free favour of God in the most convincing light.

Hitherto there had been no law, or at most only a few commandments ; which is termed the divine economy under the promise, which lasted from Adam to Moses, being about two thousand five hundred years. This economy was in its purest state before the flood, in which period, there was no civil constitution, no difference of rank, no magistrates, statutes, or laws, and no judges. Perfect liberty and equality reigned. Nothing

was expressly forbidden, nothing commanded. No one needed to obey the other, except perhaps the wife the husband; no one dared to command the other. Thus they were unacquainted both with human and divine laws, and each one lived as he pleased. Every one had then an opportunity of showing himself freely and unobstructedly, such as he really was, whether good or bad. But this, in the sequel, was attended with such evil results, that all flesh corrupted its way. Although the holy patriarchs preached against it, and God began to menace them, yet all availed nothing, and God saw himself compelled to carry his threat into execution, and to destroy mankind from the face of the earth by the deluge.

After this, God gave some laws, and in particular forbade murder. Monarchies were formed, and men were obliged to accommodate themselves to certain regulations. Thus it continued from Abraham down to Moses. During all this period, people comprehended little of what sin was, and had equally little idea of the distinguished grace of God in promising a seed, which should bruise the head of the serpent—a seed in which all nations should be blessed. For, says Paul, “sin is not imputed where there is no law.” (Rom. v. 13;) and where the enormity of sin is not felt, the greatness of divine grace is not duly estimated.

The time was now come, in which both were to be clearly revealed. God was willing to manifest his holiness in a majestic manner, by which means sin was intended also to be more clearly exhibited; and as a consequence of this consciousness, the necessity of a mediator and atoner became the more apparent. The law, says the Apostle, entered between the promise

and its fulfilment, that the offence might abound; that is, might be the more clearly recognized in its condemning, ruling, and with respect to man, invincible power; but that grace, in like manner, might be comprehended in its still greater glory. Thus man first learns sin by the law. As long as Paul lived without the law, it was, as it were, dead, and was neither felt nor recognized; but by the law sin revived, and appeared exceeding sinful, tending to death and destruction. Whilst this compelled him to regard himself as a wretched man, it induced him also to consider his deliverance as no slight or easy matter, but as a very great and important work; and deeply affected, to exclaim, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" The promise of a Redeemer made to our first parents, and confirmed to Abraham, remained in force. But by the giving of the law, it was made truly apparent what he would have to undertake, do, and suffer, to accomplish the work of redemption.

Let us then consider more closely this giving of the law, this manifestation of the holiness of God. Some preparations preceded it, as we learn from Exod. xix. First of all, God made a covenant with the people; according to which they were to be his property, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, in preference to every other, with this condition, that they should obey the voice of the Lord, and keep his covenant, which the elders vowed to do, in the name of the whole people. On this, Moses made it known, that after three days, the Lord would descend upon Sinai, that the people might hear from his own mouth the articles of the covenant. During these three days, Moses caused a fence to be made round the mountain, that no man or

beast should touch it, threatening death to those who did so. What a holiness, which the presence of God communicated to the whole mountain, so that its foot was not even to be touched by any one, and the beast that unconsciously did so, was to be stoned or thrust through with a dart! He then sanctified the people, who washed their clothes, in acknowledgment of their uncleanness. But how could such a washing take it away! Hence David says, in the consciousness of his inward impurity, "Wash me, O God! and I shall be clean; purge me, and I shall be whiter than snow!" Even the priests, who were regarded as the holiest amongst the people, and stood nearest to God, were warned not to approach the mountain, lest the Lord should destroy them. Thus all their self-righteousness was overthrown, all distinction done away, so that they all stood as sinners, coming short of the glory of God, guilty and culpable.

During these preparations, the third day appeared. Early in the morning it began to thunder and lighten; a thick cloud descended upon the mount; and the terrific sound of a very loud trumpet was heard. The whole mountain began to smoke as the smoke of a mighty furnace, mingled with flames of fire; and the enormous mass trembled and quaked in such a manner, as to be plainly perceptible. But if such a solid rock could not bear the proximity of the divine holiness—where will the ungodly and the sinner appear! How must the sinners in Zion be afraid, what trepidation seize the hypocrites, when God manifests himself as a consuming fire and everlasting burnings! At the sight of such holiness, Isaiah exclaimed, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Peter fell trembling at Jesus' feet, and

said, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" How humbly does David entreat the Lord, saying, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no flesh living be justified!" The fire with which the mountain burned, is termed a consuming fire. Its appearance was therefore terrific, and as if on the point of devouring every thing—a flame from which no one could escape. "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" How shall I escape—who will assist me—who will lead me unto life?

After the trumpet had sounded a long time, Moses led the whole of the people out of the camp towards the mountain, to meet God. How awful their situation! With Moses at their head, they ventured, however, and could not do otherwise. How will it be eventually, when all mankind are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, and when they must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive according to the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad! How necessary, O how necessary is it to become believers, that we may not come into condemnation, but have confidence, and not be ashamed at the day of judgment! Happy for us, if instead of coming to Mount Sinai, we are "come to the Mediator of the new covenant, whose blood speaketh better things, than that of Abel." Therefore let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear. "For our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. xii.) Moses spoke, and God answered him aloud. What a happiness for every humbled heart, to have an intercessor with the Father, Jesus Christ, who after he had purged our sins, is sat down for ever on the right

hand of God, and maketh intercession for us! But what will be the fate of him, who does not possess this intercessor, who does not earnestly seek him, and readily give up every thing for his sake? Seek him, therefore, that ye may live.

Moses was now commanded by the Lord, to ascend up to him, to the summit of the terrible mountain. It was therefore now evident, that this majestic God was not entirely inaccessible, and he that had understanding might infer from thence, that notwithstanding his excellence and glory, there was still a way to his friendship and fellowship. And how desirable is this to the humbled sinner! But how strange! scarcely had the aged Moses reached the summit of the mountain so difficult of ascent, when he received a command to go down again, and tell the people, that none of them should dare to break through to the Lord, so as to see him, lest many of them be destroyed. Moses objected to this, observing that the people could not approach the mountain, since by divine command it had been fenced round; nothing of the kind therefore was to be apprehended. But the command to descend was repeated, and Moses took the tedious way down again, and delivered the message to the priests and the people. Thus entirely had he to renounce his own judgment and his own will, and undertake all the labour that was laid upon him.

When Moses was again with the people, God himself began to give the ten commandments, which, however, he commenced in a gracious manner, by saying "I am the Lord thy God." Then followed the commandments. These were therefore the articles of the covenant, which were to be fulfilled; this the holiness, which God re-

quired of those with whom he was willing to enter into friendship and fellowship; this a mirror, in which they might consider their shape, and judge how far they agreed with the pattern set before them, even in its most delicate features, so that no thought or desire contrary to any of the commands of God might ever enter their hearts; this the standard, by which to measure their righteousness; the rule of their constant inward sentiment and disposition and outward deportment, as well as the test by which they would be eventually judged by the Divine Majesty, which manifested itself there in fire. “Do this, and thou shalt live;” but “cursed is he that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them!” What were they to do? Think themselves sufficiently capable of this great and comprehensive work—or look through it unto him, who is the end of the law?

The giving of the law was continued under the awful circumstances above described. It made so much the more powerful impression on the people, since Moses himself confessed, and said, “I do exceedingly fear and quake.” If such a holy man trembled, what ought not others to do? They fled, and stood afar off. So little fear was there of their breaking through!

Thus one object of the giving of the law was attained—that by which their sinfulness, their distance from God, and their inability to approach him without intervention, was made deeply perceptible to them. For thus ought every one to derive knowledge of him from the law—such a knowledge, as causes him to be afraid of God’s word, and renders his heart broken and contrite. This contrite heart is, so to speak, the only thing which the God of all grace demands, and which

he has promised to regard ; for he has engaged to bind up the broken in heart, and to heal the wounded spirit. Neither they nor any one before them has been aware, that God was such a holy being, as to require such an extensive and minute obedience, and that sin was something of such a heinous nature. And is not this the case likewise with every one, as soon as the holiness of the law becomes obvious to him, and by the same means also the sinfulness of his whole being?

But the giving of the law attained its other object also, in giving them to see the necessity of a mediator betwixt a holy God and sinful man. For this purpose they applied to the individual, who seemed to them alone suitable for the purpose, even Moses, with the request, "Speak thou with us, and we will hear ; but let not God speak with us, lest we die." The Lord approved of this proposition, and said, "They have well said, all that they have spoken. O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever!" They were mistaken, however, in some measure, in the person of the mediator, who was not, properly speaking, Moses, but another and much more exalted being ; Moses himself being a sinner, and therefore in need of a mediator, of which he was well aware, and placed so high a value upon this mediator, that he regarded the reproach of Christ as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. He pointed also, afterwards, to this true and real Mediator, who possessed all the necessary qualifications for this all-important work, when he said, "A prophet will the Lord your God raise up for you amongst your brethren like unto me." And concluded his writings

with the words, "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses." But as such a one was to rise up, the faithful directed their hopes and expectations to the future, until at length the right individual was asked, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" All are now referred to him, as the Christ, besides whom there is no Saviour. "The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ."

According to this agreement, ratified by God, in which the mediatorship between God and the people was conferred upon Moses, the latter now approached the darkness in which God dwelt. Who does not stand amazed at the admirable confidence exemplified by Moses under such terrific circumstances—a confidence so filial and fearless! Who does not rejoice at the power, which God can bestow upon the children of men, filially and confidentially to converse with him, as a man with his friend! If such was the case, under the Old Testament, where a spirit of fear predominated, and the true way of holiness was not yet thrown open—what cannot, what ought not to take place under the New Testament, which bestows a filial spirit, by which we cry, Abba, Father! and are encouraged to come boldly to the throne of grace; whilst at that period, the people were told not to come near, but to stand at a distance.

Moses was made acquainted on the mountain with several additional commands, which are recorded in *Exod. xx.—xxiii.* He then descended from the mountain, and communicated them to the people, who declared themselves ready to keep them. He now established, in a formal manner, a covenant between God and the people. "He took the blood of calves and of

goats, with water and scarlet-wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the Testament, which God hath enjoined unto you." (Heb. x. 19, 20.) "And almost all things," adds the writer of that Epistle, "are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission." Hence he deduces other important and remarkable inferences; for instance, when he says, "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh—how much more shall the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God—purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause, he is the Mediator of the New Testament, that by the means of death for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first Testament, they which are called, might receive the promise of eternal inheritance;" and other passages to the same effect, in the same chapter, which the Apostle concludes with an encouragement to a confidential approach unto God through Christ.

As defective and imperfect as the Mosaic covenant was by reason of the conditions to be fulfilled, which the people undertook in their own strength with a readiness which may be considered either laudable or mistaken—so perfect and corresponding with our necessities, is the glorious covenant, well ordered in all things and sure, which is established by the blood of Christ. After having himself undertaken and accomplished the fulfilment of all those conditions, a covenant of grace has originated in his blood, which con-

tains no demands and threatenings, but consists entirely of promises.

Let us here break off. Consider yourselves as standing with Israel on Mount Sinai, and be awakened from your dangerous dream and slumber by this fiery law, to a sense of your sinfulness; so that with Moses and the people, you may be sore afraid, and seriously inquire, which is the way to God, and to fellowship with him? in order to enter upon it, and find rest to your souls.

XVI.

OCCURRENCES AT MOUNT SINAI.

It is really affecting to listen to the manner in which God speaks by the prophet Isaiah, (chap. xliii. 26), "Put me in remembrance; let us plead together; declare thou that thou mayest be justified." In the two preceding verses, the Lord reminds his people that they had not called upon him, nor brought their offerings to him, from an impulse of love; but that, on the contrary, they had made him to serve with their sins, and wearied him with their iniquities; and yet that it was he, who blotted out their sins for his own sake, and remembered not their transgressions. If it appeared to them that their services had been too insignificant and trifling to be brought into account, God calls upon them to plead with him, and point out any other way in which they expected to be justified—whether they could find out any other, and would not be constrained, in the end, voluntarily to confess, that their whole salvation rested and consisted in the forgiveness of their sins.

In Jeremiah ii. 35, mention is also made of a pleading, or litigation, between God and man, which must

of necessity be experienced by every one, as there expressed:—"Thou sayest, because I am innocent, surely his anger shall turn from me; behold I will plead with thee, because thou sayest, I have not sinned." And frequently the process is long before an individual heartily confesses, without limitation, exception, or excuse, that he has sinned, and has nothing to plead before God; so that a certain writer does not improperly say, "That man is truly a deeply experienced Christian who thoroughly believes himself to be a sinner."*

But when this object is once properly attained, and the man sees that he has lost his cause—then occurs what is mentioned in Isaiah ii. 18, "Come now, and let us reason together; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; and though red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

May the Lord plead in such a salutary manner with us, whilst continuing the consideration of the history of his people in the wilderness!

HEB. xii. 18—21.

"For ye are not come unto the mount, that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest.

"And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words, which voice they that heard entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more.

* Still stronger is the language of our own countryman, Thomas Adam, who says, "He who knows himself to be a devil, is in a fair way to become a saint."

“ For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart.

“ And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.”

We have preferred selecting the above passage for the continuation of our meditations on the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, although without the intention of showing the great privileges implied in the negative mode of address adopted by the Apostle, when he says, “ Ye are *not* come to Mount Sinai;” to which he opposes Mount Zion.

We intend now to consider, with the Lord’s gracious assistance, what further happened at Mount Sinai, which may be regarded in a two-fold point of view. We see first, how the people, notwithstanding all their promises to the contrary, burst the bond of the covenant, and exposed themselves to the punishments threatened in it. And secondly, how they were compelled to take refuge in the mercy of God; and how Moses did not rest, until he was fully assured of their complete forgiveness.

According to the agreement which had been entered into, God, after having given the ten commands, spoke no more himself with the people. The mountain continued enveloped in a thick cloud. Moses ascended it, and returned with many additional laws, to which all the people most willingly agreed, and which they promised to keep.

Moses, who had hitherto ascended alone, now received command to take with him an escort, which consisted of seventy-three persons—Aaron, his two sons, and the

seventy elders. However, a great distinction was made between Moses and those who accompanied him; for the latter were only to stand at a distance and worship, whilst Moses was commanded to approach nearer. They had previously been sprinkled with the blood of the covenant. They then saw the God of Israel, doubtless in human form, as a fore-token of his subsequent incarnation. Nothing, however, is mentioned of his appearance, except that "there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness." (The high-priest wore a robe of this colour.) "They saw God, and upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand,"—that is, to slay them; although he had said, no one could behold him and live. Both is according to truth. No sinful man could bear to see God, as God, without a mediator. But in the mediator he is gracious; and so he manifested himself here. The sight proved refreshing to the attendants of Moses, for it is added, "When they had seen God they did eat and drink." Thus they suffered no injury from it. Does not David also pray, "Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." (Psalm lxxx. 19.)

Moses now ascended, according to divine command, a higher part of the mountain, to receive from the Lord the tables of stone. He was obliged to wait six days before any thing was said to him. For the glory of the Lord dwelt upon the mount, and covered it during the six days with a cloud. All this time Moses ate nothing, any more than during the following thirty-four days; for he passed altogether forty days upon the mount. Those first six days, which Moses spent in total silence and abstraction from every creature, must have been of

a very peculiar kind, during which his soul entered into a complete introversion, and into an extraordinary calmness, recollection, and simplicity. And that state of mind will have been produced in particular perfection, which Samuel expresses in the words, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." Habakkuk means the same thing, when he says, "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved." (chap. ii. 1.) Of Jesus himself we read, that he spent whole nights in prayer, which was doubtless a very particular species of prayer, and of a very sublime kind, such as perhaps few of his believing people understand, receive, or practise. Some, however, who are said to have been gifted with it, have written much on the subject. But if we only become increasingly poor in spirit, grieved on account of sin, meek, hungry, and thirsty after righteousness, pure in heart, and peaceful in this way, every thing else shall be added unto us. From hence, however, it is evident, that continued occupation, even in laudable things, does not altogether harmonize with an advanced state. In order to become the recipients of immediate divine communications, a recollection, abstraction, and tranquillity, must precede. Incessant speaking and hearing do not accomplish it; "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

On the seventh day, God called Moses to him, and made him acquainted with various commandments and ordinances, which are recorded in *Exod. xxv.—xxx.* The most remarkable of these is mentioned in *chap. xxv. 40*, "Look that thou make them after their pat-

tern, which was showed thee in the mount;" which command was likewise repeated in the sequel. Not only does Stephen allude to this circumstance, (Acts vii. 44), but also the Apostle, as very remarkable; and the latter deduces many important inferences from it. This command had reference to the tabernacle, and the whole of the divine worship celebrated in it, as it was also afterwards continued in the temple. This was to be minutely ordered, according to what Moses had seen on the mount. But what was it that was there shown him? Not a figure of that which he was to carry into effect on earth, like some architect, forming a plan or model of some building, to be erected according to it. That which Moses saw, the Apostle calls "heavenly things," therefore reality; that which he represented in the Levitical worship, which consisted of earthly images, and outlines of those real and heavenly things. Hence, what was shown to Moses must have been extremely important, and we shall not be going too far when we say, that he clearly perceived that there was a very different priest besides Aaron and his descendants; a very different sacrifice and incense than the latter presented, a very different blood than that which he shed; a very different atonement to that which he made; another and different purification than what he effected; and, in short, a very different order of things to that which was being instituted. This was doubtless the hidden wisdom of which David says, that God would make it known to him, and the reason why he was enabled to say, "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not"—why Isaiah said of the Lord's servant, "He shall make his soul a sacrifice for sin;"—and Zechariah, "He shall take away the people's sins in one day;"—and why

Daniel considered it something still to come, when the transgression should be finished, sin made an end of, and reconciliation made for iniquity. But it is, at the same time, easy to conceive why the public worship of God was so agreeable ; for although not the thing itself, yet it was the lively representation of the one great future sacrifice, by a priest according to the order of Melchizedeck. And does not the Lord's supper, under the New Testament dispensation, serve likewise as a sensible representation and realization of the one eternally valid sacrifice of Christ, offered up once for all on the cross ? Will it, therefore, not be celebrated with so much the greater joy by all those who acknowledge the necessity of this sacrifice for themselves individually ?

At the termination of the audience, which Moses had of God on this occasion, he received two tables of stone, on which God had written the ten commands. Meanwhile, the long forty-days' stay of Moses on the mount made a very unpleasant impression upon the unruly people, who manifested, in a very lamentable manner, that they had stony hearts, and that it required a particular exertion of divine power, in order to write the laws upon them. They gathered themselves together against Aaron in a menacing manner, with the absurd requisition to make gods for them, who might go before them. Christ says, " foolishness proceeds out of the heart of men ;" and here we truly see how far this can be the case. Can there be any thing more irrational than that a man should make gods ? And yet this was demanded by the very people, who, only six weeks before, experienced the most visible and astonishing proofs of the existence and glory of

the only true God. What a host of sins appear crowded together on this occasion ; what ingratitude and disobedience ! They are even able to give a reason for their conduct by saying, “ As for this Moses, we wot not what is become of him.” They act as though they scarcely knew such a man, so strange had he become to them. They ascribe their bringing up out of Egypt to him, which they consider as a mean piece of service ; and thus scandalously did they behave only six weeks after the giving of the law. Was it the latter, therefore, that called their perverseness to life, the more it was opposed to its manifestation ? Is the law then the power of sin ? Instead of slaying it, does it cause it to revive ? Does it take occasion by the commandment to excite in man all manner of concupiscence ? Is it so necessary to be slain by the law, in order to take refuge with another ?

But what shall we say to the conduct of Aaron, to whom the people applied—the brother of Moses, the high-priest, and one who had enjoyed the distinguished privilege of seeing God himself ? Instead of warmly opposing such a mad proposition, he even aids them in it ; at least, he seems desirous of acting with uncommon prudence in the matter, in order to secure himself on every side. Apprehensive for his own safety, he did not oppose them ; and, hoping to bring them to a different way of thinking, he requires of them their golden ornaments, which are, however, not too highly prized to be withheld for such a purpose, but they give them up immediately. He then made them a golden calf ; and we are willing to hope he imagined that a calf, even of gold, would appear to them too absurd, and that they would recognize their own brutal folly at

the sight of such a molten image, as well as become conscious with disgust of their being thus placed in the same rank with the Egyptians, who idolatrously worshipped an ox as their god. But it is only the truth which makes free, nor can any deviation from it prove beneficial. The people were well satisfied with it, and cried out, "These be thy gods, O Israel ! which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt,"

Aaron now thought he would show extreme prudence, and sought to induce the people not to honour the calf as their real God, but only as an image of the true God ; hoping this would be a small sin, or even none at all. He therefore made proclamation, and said, " To morrow is a feast to the Lord." Thus he introduced a mixture of divine and idolatrous worship, by which the first two commandments were transgressed at the same time. The people were very well satisfied with this self-chosen worship, which always pleases man better than that which God ordains. They rose up early on the morrow, and assisted in the sacrifices which Aaron offered up, and in the afternoon they sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. This was consequently a species of divine service which was very congenial to the flesh. They played, or, as it literally means, they laughed and played all kinds of tricks by way of pastime.

From the connection in which things of this kind are here mentioned, as arising from a declension from God, and an idolatrous worship, a valid inference may be drawn respecting worldly amusements, and what we who are called Christians ought to think of such things. It is evident we ought to regard them as pertaining to idolatry, and totally incompatible with godliness. The

children of Israel suffered so severely for their playing and dancing, that it cost the lives of three thousand of them. Jesus says, "Woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall weep and lament."

Thus did mirth prevail throughout the camp. They joked and laughed, sang and danced. In their merriment, they reflected neither on God, of whom they had been so much afraid, nor on Moses, who had been of such indispensable service to them, nor on the ten commandments, which the Lord himself had enjoined, and in which he had expressly forbidden them to have any other god beside himself, and the making of any graven image. They were merry and jovial. But on the mount, the matter was viewed in an entirely different light. This ought to have been their chief concern—not how they regarded it, but how it was looked upon from above. This would have been as useful as it was necessary. But this they neglected, and such is the case also with thoughtless men in general. They care not for the opinion of others, nor for what their own consciences or even God himself says upon the subject. O lamentable frivolity! Whither will it lead? How entirely it must be put away; what minute attention must they learn to pay to God, in order that it may go well with them!

The Lord, however, spoke with Moses concerning this affair. Scarcely had the latter received the two tables, when it was said to him, "Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves." God here acts as a stranger; he calls the people no longer his, but belonging to Moses, which he, and not God, had brought out of Egypt. But in this mode of speech,

something gracious was concealed. For a hint, as it were, was given him, to gainsay the Lord, and to put upon him the *thine* and the *thou*. Of this he immediately availed himself, and said, "Why doth thy wrath wax hot against *thy* people, which *thou* hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?" A singular question, when there was so much cause for wrath existing.

The Lord made Moses acquainted with the sin which the people were committing. "They have turned aside," said he, "quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, 'These be thy gods, O Israel! which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt;'" although in their disobedience they thought not of God, yet he thought of them to recompence them. He added, "I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people. Now, therefore, let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them, and I will make of thee a great nation." God had certainly a right to act as he threatened to do, if the mediator of the ancient covenant had given his consent to it. But in calling upon him to do so, he gives him at the same time to understand, that without it he would do nothing. He attacks Moses on that side, on which most men are the easiest overcome, when he says, "I will make of thee a great nation." The Lord was too well acquainted with his servant, to be apprehensive that he would agree to any thing which did not harmonize with his counsels; on which account he was enabled thus to

put him to the test. Moses saw very clearly, that every thing was left to him, when the Lord said, "Let me alone," and that consequently his people's cause was won. With regard to the honour, he referred even this back to the Lord, and reminded him of what the Egyptians would say, if he were to act thus; he also called to his remembrance the oath which he had given to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, when he had sworn by himself to give them the land; and thus showed the impossibility of acting otherwise than graciously towards his people. Thus had Moses an opportunity of discharging his office of mediator between the people and God; and he prayed and said, "Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people." And with this the Lord was well pleased. Why should he be angry, seeing that he could be gracious?

Thus comforted, Moses descended the mountain, with the two tables in his hand, on which the finger of God had inscribed his laws. Even at a distance he heard the noisy mirth which resounded from the Israelitish camp. On coming nearer, and perceiving the golden calf, and the people dancing around it, a holy zeal and indignation seized him, so that he threw the two tables of stone out of his hands, against the foot of the mountain, and brake them in pieces, not from a disgust at the commandments engraven upon the tables, but at the disobedience of the people, as though he had said, "What should such reprobate people have to do with such holy commandments? Why speak of any command to such a rebellious race, since they hear it only to forget and transgress it!"

This act of Moses, however, is neither commended nor censured; and therefore it is not permitted us to

do so. The people had indeed broken the tables of the law, and required other tables and other writing. But are not we ourselves in the same case?

Moses now took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it. Aaron received a severe reproof, and Moses said, "Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him." These he commanded to go through the camp, with their swords in their hands, and slay every idolater they met with, which they did; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. The next morning he said to the people, "Ye have sinned a great sin; and now I will go up unto the Lord, peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin." Nor did he cease, till he had again thoroughly restored every thing to its former footing.

We see here a lamentable proof of the unspeakable corruption, not only of the hearts of the Jewish people, but also of the human race in general, of which Aaron also furnishes a painful instance. Let us not leave the matter with the Jews, and ask, how could they possibly act in such a manner? Let us rather acknowledge that we are no less corrupt, no less inclined to evil, and when the temptation presents itself, no less capable of evil, and, therefore, no less culpable than they. Let us sincerely humble ourselves, and turn to the Lord, and flee, with all earnestness, to the throne of grace, and not cease our supplications, until our sins, which are great, are forgiven. "Turn us, O Lord, and we shall be turned; heal us, and we shall be healed!"

XVII.

THE INTERCESSION OF MOSES.

WHEN Job says, (chap. xiii. 15.) "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him," it is certainly a very wonderful sentiment, whether we consider it as the language of resignation or that of confidence.

It certainly, first, implies a resignation, without any reserve, to all that the Lord might further choose to lay upon him. And this can only be regarded as an easy matter by those who do not understand it. "Poor Job," it might be said, "it is easy to talk; but from whence wilt thou derive the necessary strength for the fulfilment?"

To this he might reply, "Ought I not to hope in him? What should induce me to give up my hope? Should the greatness, the violence, or the duration of my sufferings? They only compel me to it the more that every other support is taken away. A seaman may cut cable and mast, and throw gold and silver

overboard to save himself; he will not, however, part with his compass, but retain it to the last. And should the waters come into my soul, and the floods go over my head, should I not hope in him, who can allay every storm? Ought my sins to prevent me? 'If I have sinned, what shall I do unto thee, O thou preserver of men?' But do not they compel me to hope in his mercy, the less of merit I possess, and to cleave the more firmly unto him, who is made unto me righteousness, the less I can discover of any righteousness, of my own; and to trust the more fully to his atoning sacrifice, the less I can atone for anything myself? Shall my poverty prevent me from trusting in him, which renders his riches the more needful to me, and compels me to lay the more urgent claim to his royal generosity? Should sickness restrain me from trusting in him? Does it not compel me the more to have recourse to the physician who invites me to come, the more fatal and incurable my disease? Should unbelief hinder me? Who should teach me to believe, unless he does it? or my inability and boundless misery, since I require him so much on that very account? No, I will still continue to trust in him. In whom else should I trust?"

Thus he presses the more closely to the Lord, the more numerous the things which would deter him from doing so.

Thus Moses also acted, as we shall see in our present meditation.

EXOD. xxxiv. 8, 9.

“ And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped.

“ And he said, if now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord ! let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, (for it is a stiff-necked people,) and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.”

We have contemplated the occurrences at Mount Sinai in a two-fold point of view ; first, the people's sin ; and secondly, their forgiveness through the mediation of Moses. Let us now consider the latter, after having made some remarks on the former.

The children of Israel sinned against God by making a golden calf, with which they practised idolatry. Every one, however, ought to ascertain which is the calf, the earthly, sinful animal, or even brutish object with which he also practices idolatry. Let no one suppose this has no reference to him ; for although it may not be the case in a gross external sense, yet let him be on his guard, lest he be entangled in a more subtle sense, in a deeper and more dangerous idolatry.

Though it may be something uncommon for any one to be so senseless as to affirm that there is no God, since the contrary is much too deeply impressed on human nature, yet so much the more common is it for people to act as if there were no God, no judgment, and no eternity. If they were really persuaded of the fact, they would also act differently ; for a belief and an assent which produces no influence on

the human mind, is of no value, and is equivalent to a denial.

But the Scriptures speak of another idolatry, besides that which is grossly heathenish. They speak of those whose God is their belly, and who regard the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life as the supreme good, but whose end, as saith the Apostle, is destruction. The Holy Scriptures speak also of the idolatry of covetousness. Therefore he who is covetous and greedy of gain, is guilty of idolatry; and this species of idolatry is principally carried on in the mercantile world, whose chief object is gain; for whilst other stations in life are limited to something definite, the whole world is, so to speak, open to this. And how many rich mercantile houses have we seen in our day, who by grasping with their insatiate desires, that which they had not, have paid for it by the loss of what they possessed. And how many tricks and deceptions, artifices and stratagems, are regarded as allowable, which are most injurious to the soul; for no covetous man shall inherit the kingdom of God, any more than a murderer or a blasphemer.

Men also make a god of themselves; that is, they love themselves above every thing, and more than God himself. They make themselves, their own will, their pleasure, honour, and advantage their chief object, to which every thing else is subjected, and for which, if necessary, they are ready to give up every thing, even God and his fellowship. Every confidence which a man places in himself is nothing but a subtle idolatry, and is no less culpable than that which is more gross. And thus, though there may be no more golden calves and idols, the idolatry which is practised in the world

is still great and very frequent. The world and its lusts are the idols of the men of the world, and about these they dance, like the Israelites around their golden calf.

Nor will they suffer their sins, in this respect, to be placed before them, but seek a variety of excuses and evasions; even as Adam did, who laid all the blame upon his wife, and wished his Maker himself to share in it, by saying, "the woman that *thou* gavest me." But he that hides his transgression shall not prosper. If on the contrary, "we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." Thus Aaron sought to exculpate himself, when Moses reproved him, and said, "What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?" Instead of humbling himself before God, he abases himself before his brother, and says, "Let not the anger of my Lord wax hot, thou knowest the people that they are set on mischief." As if that were any sufficient reason for his encouraging them in it! He also wishes it to be thought he had acted very innocently. "I required their gold of them," says he, "I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf." Truly, God had reason to say to the people, "not on account of thy righteousness and the integrity of thy heart dost thou go up to possess the land, seeing that thou art a stiff-necked people." Jesus had good ground for calling mankind crooked and perverse, and David for praying to be divested of every false way. He that considers how much is implied in a pure and sincere heart, will not easily boast of possessing one. A single eye fills the whole body with light; but an evil eye with darkness. The heart of man, says Jeremiah, is

“deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.” Hence David prays, “Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Moses had undertaken, as mediator of the old covenant, to make the attempt to atone for the sins of the people. This was no easy matter, but he did not cease until he had wrought out a complete forgiveness. He first fell upon his face, and continued lying in this manner, incredible as it may seem, forty days and as many nights before the Lord, without taking any nourishment, certainly a long and serious penance for the people’s sin. “For I was afraid,” says he, (Deut. ix. 19) “of the anger and hot displeasure wherewith the Lord was wrath against you to destroy you.” Moses did this from the impulse of an unspeakable love to his people, which God had enkindled in him, and which went so far, that he prayed, and said, “O, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, forgive their sin; but if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book, which thou hast written.” Jesus said to his disciples, “Rejoice that your names are written in heaven;” and Moses believed, with reason, that he could thus rejoice, as regarded himself; and this was the ground of his happiness. And yet his love went so far, that he was willing, for their sakes, even to renounce his salvation. We have a similar instance of such amazing love in a mere man, in the Apostle Paul, who wished that he were accursed from Christ, for the sake of his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh. (Rom. ix. 3.) An incredible degree of affection, which can go so far, as not only to induce the individual to love others as much as himself, but even to venture his soul and salvation for them. But

the offer of both was rejected, and Moses received the reply, "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book." The sufficient sacrifice was reserved to another. Who is not reminded here of Christ's forty days' residence in the wilderness, of his falling on his face, his strong cries and tears, his agony and excessive sorrow : of the wondrous offering up of himself during the three hours' darkness and abandonment on the cross, which sacrifice for ever perfected them that are sanctified ? He suffered himself to be "made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Moses accomplished something by his first attempt at reconciliation, although but little. God acted towards him in a serious and reserved manner. He gave him to know indeed, that mindful of his oath, he would give them the promised land, but speaks of the people, as if Moses, and not He, had brought them up out of Egypt, and even lets him perceive, that he still retained an inward and restrained wrath, which might break out any moment, for the destruction of the stiff-necked people ; he therefore intended to give them a being less holy than himself, a created angel, to be their guide. This estrangement, so devoid of any real fellowship, is quite in accordance with the Old Testament constitution. The Lord acted thus, not with the intention of deterring Moses, but rather to produce a humiliation under his mighty hand ; for although he might have spent forty days and forty nights on his face before God, yet all this availed nothing towards the reconciliation of the culpable people ; something very different must take place, in order fully to restore a good understanding. Moses was to transfer this

humiliation to the people ; but also with regard to himself, it was to induce him to cleave the more closely to the heart of God.

Accordingly, all this took place. Moses was obliged to say to the people in the name of God, "Ye are a stiff-necked people; I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee. Therefore now put off thine ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee." The people obeyed. At the same time Moses took away the tabernacle out of the camp, and erected it elsewhere, as if the people were not worthy that God should dwell amongst them. Nor did the pillar of cloud and of fire abide over them, but over the tabernacle, without the camp. These must have been anxious days of penitence and expectancy of that which was about to happen ; and doubtless no one thought of playing and dancing, but rather of sighing and weeping. How must they have lamented their apostacy from God, their perverseness and folly, and have seriously resolved never to offend God again ! Such are the manifestations of repentance ! It is thus the heart must be rendered contrite and humble ; thus must it perceive its unworthiness and culpability. Do you know any thing of this repentance ?

When Moses went out unto the tabernacle, all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent-door, and looked after Moses, until he was gone into the tabernacle ; and the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses, as a man with his friend. Every one then bowed himself, at the entrance of his tent, and entreated the favour of the Lord, according to the sublime example presented by Moses.

Thus doubtful did matters stand for a period, and the people knew not whether God would act with them according to grace or justice. Their mediator, however, availed himself of the intimate connection in which he stood towards God, to act in their favour, and complained that the conducting of the people was left to him, and yet he knew not whom the Lord would send with him, although he had said, "I know thee by thy name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight." "If I have therefore found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight, and consider that this nation is thy people." (Exod. xxxiii. 12, 13.) We may imagine with what fervour and urgency Moses interceded, and probably mingled his supplications with many sighs and tears. Thus, the Church complains in Isaiah (lxiii. 15), "Where is thy zeal and thy strength, and the sounding of thy bowels and thy mercies toward me? are they restrained?" It may seem for a period, and even for a long period, as if every thing was in vain, and as if God had in great wrath shut up his mercy. The night may become increasingly dark and terrific, before the friendly morning breaks, in which the wrestler is caressed, after the dislocation of his thigh. It is certainly no easy and agreeable thing to lose one's own life in order to find it again for Christ's sake.

Moses received a favourable answer, which he immediately seized and turned to his advantage. God had previously said, that he would send a mere angel with him, which appeared painful intelligence to all; but now the Lord says, "My presence shall go with thee to guide thee." The Lord here distinguishes his presence from himself, because there is a plurality in the

Divine Being. This presence of God is his Son, the reflection of his glory, and the express image of his person. Moses immediately laid hold of this, and said, "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence! For wherein shall it be known, that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight, that so we may be distinguished from every other nation upon earth?" The answer was, "I will do this thing also, that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in my sight, and I know thee by thy name."

Thus it happened to Moses according as it is written, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." "Whatsoever ye ask in prayer; believe, and ye shall receive it." Here were fulfilled also the astonishing words which we read of Joshua, "and God hearkened to or obeyed the voice of the man." There are times in which faith has God, so to speak, in its power, and is assured, that it will receive every thing for which it prays; and in which he fulfils the desire of such as fear him, and their hearts are certain that his ear attends to them. How incredibly condescending can the Lord be towards a duly prepared soul! How much may the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avail!

The heart of Moses was as boundless as the ocean, and his desires as its billows; hence he prayed further, and said, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory!" Wondrous request! In our present state, our eyes cannot even bear to look at the sun in its splendour—how then should a mortal be able to contemplate the glory of his Creator! But such is the nature of the new creature, produced by regeneration in the elect. It is of God, and thirsts and strives for God, and cannot

rest until it perfectly possesses and enjoys him. All concealments and manifestations, all approaching and removing from the heart, all consolation and grieving only excites its ardent longing still more. "Heart and flesh cry out for the living God." "Have ye not seen him whom my soul loveth? Tell him I am sick of love." This new creature, according to Paul's expression, travails in birth, and longs for the adoption and the redemption of the body. As insatiate as nature is after earthly things, so insatiate is the new nature after the things that are divine.

Do you also perceive in you this longing and thirsting after God, and perfect fellowship with him? or are these strange and surprising things to you? Do you also long to be delivered from the body of sin and death? that God would strengthen you by his Spirit's might in the inner man? If this be the case, do not fear lest you should not be satisfied; for if you seek the Lord with your whole heart, he will let himself be found of you. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face; therefore thy face, Lord, will we seek. Hide not thy face from me, but make me glad with thy countenance!"

XVIII.

THE DIVINE MANIFESTATION.

EXOD. xxxiv. 1—9.

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first, and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.

“ And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount.

“ And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount, neither let the flocks and herds feed before that mount.

“ And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up into Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone.

“ And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

“ And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth,

“ Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

“ And Moses made haste, and bowed his head towards the earth and worshipped.

“ And he said, If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord,

let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance ”

THE children of Israel had now sojourned about a year near Mount Sinai and in the neighbouring desert. It is time for them to remove further; but they have made themselves unworthy of being placed under the Lord's immediate guidance. Moses, however, does not cease his intercessions, until he has procured them complete forgiveness, which bursts forth in its greatest splendour, like the morning dawn, in the verses prefixed, and is sealed by the two new tables of the law.

Moses had offered the bold request to God, to be permitted to behold his glory. This request was partially granted. “ I will make,” it is said, “ all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee.” But the Lord added, “ I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious; and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.” Had the idea secretly arisen in Moses, that he had possibly acquired some just claim for a recompense, on account of his repeated tedious ascent, and perhaps more difficult descent from the mount, his zeal for God, and his faithful obedience—which, however, we cannot affirm—such a self-righteous idea would have been overthrown by the expression, “ I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” It is unmerited grace, and nothing but grace, and must be recognized as such. But there lies also in these words an emphasis, as if the Lord intended to say, where I manifest grace, it is in a no inconsiderable fulness and extent. If any one desires much, the

Lord can give still more; if we ask for great things, he can give still greater. If merit is of no avail, the absence of it can be no hindrance. It is grace, the grace of God, and what cannot that effect?

The Lord adds a limitation. Moses was to see him only from behind, not his face, but, as it were, his back-parts. These words probably imply much. Certainly the ways of God must first have reached their termination, before we can fully perceive their wisdom and suitableness. The propriety of the sufferings and death of Jesus was evident to his disciples only after his resurrection. Before it, every thing seemed altogether the reverse. Such was the case also with the sickness and death of Lazarus, the man born blind, the woman of Cana, as well as in repeated instances, the guidance of individuals. It seems to them evident, that they ought to have been led in an entirely different manner, if any good were to be attained by it, and that the case would be very different, if God had thoughts of peace, love, and favour towards them. But afterwards they rejoice, and are perhaps the most grateful for being led by such a dark and gloomy path, and perceive that the greatest blessing had been conferred, where they had previously expected nothing of the sort, or perhaps the very opposite; for the being made sorrowful precedes the being made glad, and dying before being made alive.

God appointed the time and place where he would confer the favour which Moses had requested of him; and this was on Mount Sinai, early the next morning; and also the manner of it, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." All the goodness of God is

treasured up in Christ. In him was life. His riches are unsearchable, and “out of his fulness have all we received grace for grace.” All that the Father has is his. He that seeth him seeth the Father. He is the anointed head, from whom salvation extends to all his members.

This is he, who is to proclaim the name of the Lord. “I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it, that the love wherewith thou hast loved me, may be in them, and I in them.” He has revealed him as a gracious Father, and commanded us thus to address him, regard him, believe in him, and be affected towards him, he has revealed him as being in him, reconciling the world unto himself.

A preparation on the part of Moses precedes the gracious manifestation of God. This was his providing himself with two stone tables, on which the Lord himself would write, and which were to be deposited in the ark under the propitiatory.

These tables were twofold; the first teaches, in four commandments, our duty towards God, and the other in six, what we owe to our neighbour. They comprehend the principal duties of mankind. For when a vice is prohibited, the opposite virtue is enjoined. Besides which, the law is spiritual, forbidding not only the deed, but also the thought, desire, or whatever may incite to it, and these ten commands are summed up by Christ into two—supreme love to God, and the love of our neighbours as ourselves.

The tables were of stone, a figure of the human heart in its hardness, unbending, and disobedient nature; so that this stony heart must be taken away, and a heart of flesh be given in its stead. The stone was, at the

same time, an emblem of the old constitution of things, which could not render perfect, nor assist the sinner in any manner; but pointed to something else, although "the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end of that which is abolished, because Moses put a veil over his face," (2 Cor. iii. 13,) which is done away in Christ.

The tables were new, instead of the old ones that were broken, as significant of a new and better order of things; the covenant of works was once broken and could not be cemented again. The Sinaitic law made the evil still worse, since sin became only the more powerful and extremely sinful by the commandment. Hence room was sought for a better constitution of things. God inscribed the law upon these tables; even as he afterwards promised to write his laws on their hearts, and engrave them in their inward parts.

These new tables were hewn by Moses himself; and in the new covenant, every thing is well ordered as regards the necessities of the sinner. The covenant of grace contains no threatenings, since Jesus has become a curse for all those that are parties to it, that he might redeem them from the curse, and that they might receive the adoption and the blessing.

The first covenant might, and really was broken. But the covenant of grace cannot be broken, because it rests upon grace, and because every thing in it depends upon the free and gracious good pleasure of God. It consists of the sure mercies of David. "The gifts and calling of God are without repentance." Were this covenant to become invalid, "there would remain no more offering for sin, but a fearful looking for of

judgment, which would devour the adversaries." " But God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that we might have strong consolation, as an anchor, entering into that which is within the veil, whither Jesus is for us entered." (Heb. vi. 17—20.)

After these preparations, Moses ascended the mount, early the next morning, to the place pointed out to him, and there an uncommonly gracious manifestation of the glory of God was vouchsafed to him, in which, however, he heard more than he saw, as he faithfully informs us. The revelation took place as follows. The Lord descended in a cloud, and drew near to Moses, and proclaimed, " The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in goodness and in truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Before whom, no one is innocent, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation."

The herald was a different person to the one whom he announced, although both the one and the other was the Lord. The Lord passed by and spoke to the Lord. We observe in these remarkable words, which Moses heard, first, the address: Jehovah, Jehovah, El. As the latter name implies his power, so the former indicates his eternity, unchangeableness, grace, and punctuality in the fulfilment of all that he has engaged in his promises, and which his omnipotence enables him to do. In the twofold repetition of the supreme name, there is doubtless a peculiar emphasis.

If he were not so unchangeable and true, he might repent of his promises ; but now he keeps mercy for thousands.

The contents of the proclamation of the Son of God comprehend the whole covenant of grace, in which God glorifies all his attributes in the most brilliant manner, and that too, in a way very consolatory and gratifying to the sinner. No one is innocent before him,* it is said further ; he regards no one as such, not even Moses, although he had taken no part in the open impiety of the people. Even Moses, this servant, who was faithful in all his house, erred so far, thirty years afterwards, as to lose his entrance into Canaan, and was compelled to leave his bones with the rest of the disobedient in the desert. The more thoroughly, frankly, sincerely, and uprightly any one acknowledges and confesses himself to be not innocent but guilty—so much the easier will he make his peace with God. We must first agree to the judgment of God upon ourselves and all men, and we may then avail ourselves of his being in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Fortunately, the whole covenant of grace is calculated for our sinfulness, as an hospital is for the sick. After the fall, God can only deal with men as sinners, and sinful men can make peace with him by no other means than by the way of the covenant of grace. A single condition to be performed by the sinner in his own strength, would render the whole unavailable to him, and overthrow

* This is implied also in our English version, “ he will by no means clear *the guilty*,” although the last two words are supplementary, since all the world is become guilty before God.

the covenant; since the first covenant was founded upon a by no means important condition, and yet was broken.

“ Before whom no one is innocent ;” but this only expresses what is implied in the following words, “ Who visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, even to the third and fourth generation.” He does not suffer evil to go unpunished, either in the fathers or the children, whether it be the culpable individual himself, or his representative and surety. Sin continued, according to the apostolic expression, under the divine forbearance, until God set forth his Son to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood. (Rom. iii. 25.) He laid upon him the accumulated guilt of all mankind, and when it was required of him, “ he was bruised for our transgressions and wounded for our sins ; the chastisement lay upon him, that we might have peace ; and by his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah liii.)

The Lord himself proclaims his covenant virtues, when he commends the Lord as merciful, gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth ; for thus he appears in the covenant of grace. He is *merciful*, fervently loving ; this has reference to the wretched and comfortless, over whom every wave and billow flows. His heart melts at the sighing and crying of the poor and the needy, so that he must have compassion upon them. For we have such an high priest as can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been tried and tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin, that he might be a faithful high priest, in things pertaining to God.

The Lord is not only merciful, but *gracious*. By

which expression he removes an important scruple from the minds of those, who, feeling their unworthiness, know not what could induce the Lord to look upon them, and have compassion upon them. What could induce him to do so? This—that he is gracious. He is inclined to do good, and does not wait for worthy objects on which to expend his beneficence.

The Lord praises, thirdly, the *long suffering* of the Lord. He does not suffer himself to be immediately excited to anger by faults, which do not spring from a bad intention, but exemplifies sparing patience and indulgence. If he expects that such weak creatures as we should forgive our neighbour seventy times seven times—how much more forgivingly will he act towards those who do not willingly offend, mourn, and grieve on account of their transgression, and apply afresh to his grace. He gives time and space for repentance. Let every one avail himself of it with all eagerness, lest divine patience be wearied, and his wrath awake.

“*Abundant in goodness and in truth.*” Thus John says, “the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.” The Lord justly commends his grace as abundant; for it is so, because it is the grace of God, which is greater and more precious than every thing, and merits our desire more than any thing else. Hence Paul wishes the churches, “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” as the most excellent blessing. It is abundant, because of the astonishing price paid to procure it, which demanded nothing less than the blood and life of the Son of God himself. It is abundant, because it extends to such an innumerable multitude, whom no man can number, out of every nation, kindred, and tongue; and because it delivers us from such a depth of misery, and translates us into

such an indescribable felicity ; abundant, because it alone relieves the necessities of the sinner, and does every thing for him which is requisite for his salvation.

With goodness, the Lord combines the commendations of the Lord's *faithfulness and truth*. Abraham esteemed him faithful who had promised him a son, and did not speculate upon it, but believed most firmly, that what God had promised he would also perform. "Faithful is he," writes the Apostle to the Thessalonians, "who hath called you, who also will do it." God gives indeed promises, but they are not straightway and without any obstruction accomplished and fulfilled. His ways are often directly contrary to those of reason ; a long time must frequently first elapse, and many difficulties be overcome. But great is his faithfulness, and what he promises, he will certainly perform ; and though he should first suffer every thing to fall to ruin, yet at length, his truth comes forth triumphantly out of it.

Mercy manifests itself especially in forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. A glorious expression, as placed opposite the grievous sin the people had just committed ! What would become of us, were there no forgiving God ? He forgives sins of every kind, and to any extent, if penitentially acknowledged, and recourse be had to the all-atoning blood of the Lamb. The Lord, who is abundant in goodness and in truth, proclaims himself, that he forgives transgressions. It is therefore certain and beyond a doubt. O let it be an undoubted certainty in the heart of every one, who is concerned for the salvation of his soul, and on this very account the source of a joy, which is our strength, for the purposes of a godly life !

Thus Moses ceased not, nor departed from Mount

Sinai, until he was fully assured of complete reconciliation, forgiveness, and friendship. He had made this a condition ; otherwise, said he, “carry us not up hence.” This he also obtained. And they then joyfully pursued their course. Thus, by the great mercy of Jehovah, their wretched state became the occasion and opportunity of his manifesting himself so much the more gloriously to that unworthy race. It is true, they were compelled to reside a year in the terrific regions of Sinai, but even as there is a natural brook of excellent water, which falls down from the summit of Sinai, so a still more precious stream of grace flowed down in the revelation of the divine glory to these poor sinners. Therefore let us not faint whilst being truly humbled, that we may be exalted in due time. If the former be painful, the latter will be the more pleasing.

Moses then hastily fell upon the ground and worshipped. Unspeakable emotions pervaded his soul ; he therefore said not a word, but was silent. So much the more affected was his heart, and so much the more replete with thankfulness, praise, and love ; until he at length broke out into the words, “O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us, for it is a stiff-necked people ; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance !”

And what is more proper for us, than thus to fall down and worship, and beseech the Lord to go with us and be merciful and gracious unto us ; to pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for his inheritance !

XIX.

ISRAEL'S ORDER OF MARCH.

NUMB. x. 11—13.

“ And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony.

“ And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai ; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran.

“ And they first took their journey according to the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses.”

THUS we come at length to the twelfth encampment, in the second month of the second year, after the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt.

In consequence of the long sojourn of Moses on Mount Sinai, and of his being so near the Lord, his face had become radiant without his knowledge. It shone ; rays proceeded from it, which, though glorious in their appearance, excited fear, rather than pleasure ; therefore, when he came down from the mountain, Aaron, as well as the rest of the children of Israel were afraid to approach him. Moses was therefore compelled to put a veil over his face, after which they

were able to bear it, and could converse with him. When he went into the tabernacle he laid aside the veil, and then they saw his face shining : on coming out, he covered it again. If the glory of Moses was intolerable to sinners, what must the glory of God himself be !

But this circumstance has also its signification, which Paul explains to us in 2 Cor. iii. 7—18 : he there compares the law and the gospel, in order to trace the advantage of the latter over the former. The ministration of Moses, or the law, was only the ministration of the letter, which does not render righteous, holy, and joyful, or quicken, but killeth ; whilst, on the contrary, the New Testament is the ministration of the Spirit, which renders us righteous, holy, and happy. The former passes away, which is very desirable ; the latter continues, even to the end of the world, and extends into eternity. The glory of the former was so great, that the children of Israel could not look at the face of Moses ; but the latter has a superabundant glory, before which the former fades away ; and yet so far is it from exciting fear and terror, that it delights, encourages, and enlivens. “ We beheld his glory,” says John, “ the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” The covering is on the hearts of all men by nature, and is put off in conversion : the glory of the Lord then increasingly reflects itself in us, as in a mirror, and we gradually become changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord. Our souls, as well as the face of Moses, become resplendent through confidential intercourse with God. Let us, therefore, diligently exercise ourselves in it.

“He that is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.”

Aaron had the unhappiness, whilst in the desert of Sinai, to see his two eldest sons slain, at the same time, by the hand of the Lord. Their sin consisted in using strange fire in the sanctuary, for the incense; on which, fire went forth from the Lord, and consumed them, so that they both died before the Lord: such strictness is requisite in the Lord's service! It does not solely depend upon what is done, but rather on the way and manner in which it is done. Moses perfectly justified the divine act, by saying, “This is it which the Lord hath said: I will be sanctified in them that approach unto me, and be glorified by all people.” But Aaron held his peace, and probably considered it as a judgment upon him, for the part he had taken in the affair of the golden calf.

The Lord, in this instance, again manifested his holiness. O how much is requisite, in order worthily to approach unto God! and with what irreverence, presumption, and arrogance, do men approach the truth, the Bible, prayer, divine service, baptism, and the Lord's supper! If God were willing to repeat what he once did to Aaron's sons, as a warning example for every age—how often would a devouring fire proceed from him! We ought not to make use of his holy name, except with fear and reverence, remembering that God is a holy God, and ought therefore to excite our fear and our dread.

Aaron and his remaining sons were, besides this, commanded not to show any signs of mourning, lest they also should be slain. They were not to depart

from the tabernacle, just as if nothing had occurred, and leave the people to lament over this terrific instance of the Lord's jealousy.

On this occasion, God commanded the priests to drink no strong drink when they went into the tabernacle. Possibly Aaron's sons had taken too much, and thus made the mistake with the fire. Excess and drunkenness are in themselves sinful, and are no excuse for other sins that may be committed in a state of inebriety, and which debase the individual below a senseless brute.

In the desert of Sinai, God also appointed the order in which the twelve tribes should march and encamp. In this regulation Judah was the first, Naphthali the last. They formed a square, in the midst of which was the tabernacle; so that three tribes faced each quarter of the heavens. I cannot refrain from stating the signification of several of the names of the captains, which I will mention alphabetically, because these names contain a variety of intimations, useful to those who are desirous of successfully prosecuting their journey through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan.

The first of these captains was called Amminadab—my willing people. And certainly, willingness to renounce the world and sin, and to obey God, is a qualification without which no one can arrive at Canaan. As long as this willingness is wanting, there is a deficiency in the very commencement of any thing good. "After thy victory, thy people shall willingly serve thee in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm cx. 3; German version.)

Another captain was called Ammihud—the glory of my people. The glory of God's people seemed so great

to Moses, that he preferred "suffering affliction with the people of God, to the temporal enjoyments of sin ; and esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." And towards the end of his course, we hear him exclaiming, "Happy art thou, O Israel ! who is like unto thee, O people ! saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and the sword of thy excellency?" And certainly every one must be so convinced of the inestimable advantages of the people of God, notwithstanding all their afflictions, as to prefer them to every other, and rather forsake all, than renounce his part in them ; ready to abandon every thing, rather than not be a disciple of Christ.

Ammi-shaddai was a third leader, and means, the people of the omnipotent and all-sufficient God. For in this consists their glory ; they abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and dwell in the secret place of the Most High, (Psalm xci. 1.) The power of God preserves them through faith unto salvation. Christ strengthens them, through whom they come off more than conquerors. Were they not in such powerful hands, they would long ago have perished, since the world, the devil, and our own flesh, do not cease to assail us ; and we are in ourselves so weak that we could not stand a single moment.

A fourth captain was called Abidau—my father is my judge. How necessary is it for a pilgrim, on his wearisome pilgrimage through the tedious and horrible desert of this world, to feel convinced from Scripture, that neither the law, nor the devil, nor even his own conscience, but God, as his reconciled Father in Christ, is his judge, and the atonement of Christ the basis of his judgment. If shod with this preparation, we walk

with alacrity ; and very much depends upon it, in order to walk without weariness, and retain our courage.

Ahiezer was a fifth captain—my brother is my helper. And such is the case with God's people. Jesus, their helper, is not ashamed to call them brethren ; and what an encouragement to faith does this contain ! We generally confide in a brother by preference ; and who would not trust such a brother as this ? This confidence is indispensable in our journey through this desert ; and the more we possess of it, the less we feel the fatigue : for as, by reason of our extreme poverty, we cannot travel at our own expense, we must do so on the credit of our first-born brother ; and the more free use we make of his inexhaustible riches, the less shall we be in want of that which is needful or convenient.

There is still a sixth captain, who would have been better away. His name is Ahira—my wicked brother. On this point I need not say much, for you will be yourselves well aware of his uncalled-for interference. I am even of opinion that we ought not to call him our wicked brother, but our wicked self ; for a brother, however near he may be to us, is still a different person to ourselves. However, if we are born again, it is no longer ourselves, but our brother. It is then no longer I that do evil, but sin—this Ahira which dwells within, which we must put off, crucify, and slay ; it is the law in the members, striving against the law of the mind, the flesh lusting against the spirit, the sin that so easily besets us ; it is that which makes us groan, being burdened, as long as we are in this tabernacle. This Ahira was a son of Enan, that is, Great-eye ; for truly he seeks to be great.

These are the captains whose names begin with A.

Let us now mention some which begin with E. One bore the precious name of Eliab—God is my Father! This is something unspeakably blessed. The term father, implies a most endearing connection, and the most desirable superintendence, affection, care, provision, and inheritance; as well as the right of governing and correcting, the obligation to reverence, reciprocal affection, confidence, obedience, and submission. This follows of course, when God is truly recognized as father, and when the Holy Spirit teaches us to call him *our* father, notwithstanding Ahira's attempts to hinder it. "Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward;" for if he correct us, it is for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness.

Another captain was called Eliezer—our God is a refuge. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it and is safe." There is no protection without God, and none else is requisite but his. He will be a wall of fire round about his people; and how much do they need it in the many dangers to which they are exposed, against which they are the less able to cope, the more they imagine themselves so.

Eliasaph, the son of Deguel, was a third captain. The latter name betokens the knowledge of God; the former, God gives growth and increase. And are not both indispensable whilst traversing the desert, and in order to enter Canaan? Christ declares the knowledge of the only true God, and him whom he hath sent, to be eternal life. All other knowledge is vain in comparison with it. This knowledge is necessary, in order that we may be able to conduct ourselves towards God in a be-

coming manner—love, fear, and honour him with our whole hearts—confide solely and wholly in him, and expect, in all humility and patience, every blessing from him; and hence it is needful for our sanctification, consolation, and comfort.

The word Eliasaph implies, that God gives growth and increase, “They shall grow as the grass, and as the willows by the water-courses.” Without him we cannot add one cubit to our stature, nor make one hair white or black. “He giveth the increase,” says the Apostle, and adds, “therefore, neither he that planteth, nor he that watereth, is any thing.” Both must indeed be done, both naturally and spiritually; even as Paul did, with all fidelity; but this is practised the more joyfully and unweariedly, the more we are convinced that God gives the increase. If this be the case, then we boldly plant. Though the nature of the soil may be discouraging, and the seed not appear in the measure that philanthropy, or perhaps self-love may desire—yet, if sown in dependance upon him that giveth the increase, we confidently wait until the fruit of our labours appears. Thus it is also individually. Continue thy efforts, use the means of grace, hear, read, and, praying, have recourse to Jesus; and thy labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

A fourth captain was called Elishama—thou, God, hearest me! “O thou that hearest prayer,” says David, “unto thee shall all flesh come!” “Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.” “He that asketh, receiveth.” Let us therefore not murmur at our poverty, weakness, and manifold necessities, but derive from them an incentive to prayer, and remember, in the exercise of it, that “Thou,

God, hearest me?" Although we are not at liberty to prescribe time, or measure, or method to him; yet, if we ask any thing according to his will, we know that we have the petitions we asked of him. No wonder you receive nothing, if you do not ask. "Ask, therefore, that ye may receive, that your joy may be full."

Gamaliel, God is my reward, is another captain. The word *El*, the mighty God, appears in many of the names, and that justly: "for of him, and through him, and to him, are all things." He it is from whom cometh down every good and perfect gift, and to whom therefore all the glory belongs. "I am thy exceeding great reward," says God to Abraham and his seed; and Christ promises those who, for his sake, abandon houses, children, fields, or whatsoever it be, an hundred-fold return in the kingdom of God, with persecutions, and in the world to come, eternal life.

How much is contained in the expression, "I am thy reward!" The all-sufficient God will do his utmost, so to speak, to recompence us for that which we have renounced for his sake, or rather for the sake of our own salvation. He will do so here in part, but more perfectly and certainly in his heavenly kingdom. He that knows in some measure how to estimate the promise, will not care much for the difficulties of the way, but hasten towards the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Gamaliel was the son of Pedahzur, likewise a much implying name—"Delivering fortress;" by which we are assured of reaching our glorious aim. Gideoni was also the captain of a host; "My destroyer," is the meaning of this name. Justly can this be applied to Christ, who came to destroy the works of the devil. We require him for the destruction

of the Babel that is in us. His word shall destroy every high tower, and every thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of Christ.

We notice also the names of Nathaneel and Nashon. The latter denotes something serpentine; and we know that we must beware, lest the serpent beguile us from the simplicity of the gospel; yet Christ also commends to us the wisdom of the serpent, as well as the harmlessness of doves. And this is certainly necessary to pursue our journey safely. The righteous must not be deficient in wisdom, nor can they be so to whom Christ is made wisdom; but the wisdom that cometh from above is entirely opposed to the wisdom of this world. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not." Wisdom is also requisite to put us upon our guard against the seduction of the world and the devices of Satan, and to enable us successfully to use our weapons against our spiritual adversaries, so that having done all, we may be able to stand against them. But well may we ask, "Who is so wise as to understand these things?" (Hosea xiv. 9.)

Nathaneel means "the gift of God." This man's father was called Zuar, little. And is it not to the humble and the lowly, that the Lord gives grace? Is it not great wisdom vitally to know that every good thing is the gift of God? both for the purpose of thanking him, as well as that we may apply to the right source? And these gifts are so far from being in the hands of one who is greedy of them, that he asks the Jews, "Have ye ever found me as a spring, whose waters fail?" And Christ assures us, that "if we who are evil, can give good gifts to our children, how much

more will our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him!" Happy therefore are the poor, that stand in need of much, and the humble, who willingly receive, not a few things merely, but everything! And how should we be able to take one step in the path of life, or persevere in it, without continued divine communications?

Two valuable names are still to be noticed. The first is Pagiel; which implies something most desirable, for it means, "My intercessor is God." O how admirable! What gift shall fail us then, with what firm and steady confidence shall we expect every gift, even the greatest, whilst apprehending the worst. Pagiel, God is my intercessor! "We have an intercessor with the Father." If our prayers are weak, his intercession is the more effectual. The last name is perhaps the most precious of all. Shelumiel, the son of Zuri-shaddai. "God is my peace, the all-sufficient my fortress."

O Israel, who is like unto thee? Thou people, who hast such a guide through the desert; how canst thou miss thy way! Thou shalt prosper, whilst thy enemies shall be overthrown. "Who is this that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" Lord, open our eyes, that we may behold the wonders contained in thy word, and guide our feet into the way of peace! Our Father and our God!

XX.

THE ISRAELITES MURMUR.

NUMB. xi. 4—6.

“And the mixed multitude that was amongst them, fell a lusting, and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, who will give us flesh to eat?

“We remember the flesh, which we did eat in Egypt freely, the cucumbers and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.

“But now our soul is dried away, there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes.”

THE children of Israel are encamped at Taberah their twelfth station, where several remarkable things occurred; and we commence with the consideration of the people's discontent, its cause, manner of expression, and effect.

The people are discontented, they murmur, complain, and weep. They are dissatisfied with the whole affair. And why? of what are they in want? They become impatient, and their whole guidance seems very tedious and laborious to them. But were they completely in the wrong in so doing? It is true, they

were the people of God. They were the peculiar object of his most especial superintendence and care. This was an uncommon privilege, for which, however, if I may so speak, they paid dearly enough, and were compelled to put every thing to the stake. “We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter”—says the Apostle, quoting from the Psalms, and establishes it as a rule, that “through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God ;” even as our Lord himself declares, that he who will be his disciple, must take up his cross daily ; and again, his Apostle says, “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus *must* suffer persecution.” “Many are the afflictions of the righteous ;” and the resolution to deny ourselves continually, to lose our own lives, to assent continually to whatever the Lord chooses to lay upon us—is saying very much.

The poor people were now in a waste-howling wilderness. Nothing presented itself in the way of food, but that which descended from heaven, which lasted only for a day, and they had water only by a miracle from the rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. The eye was tired of resting upon the horrible uniformity of the boundless waste around it, which produced only here and there a solitary thorn or brier. Not a trace of any previous traveller. No pleasing sound delighted the ear. No turtle dove cooed its melancholy note, no lark soared warbling aloft, as if to point the way to the repenting mind. Nothing but an occasional howl was heard. Sometimes a solitary pelican sounded its harsh and grating note, or the roar of hungry lions and the growls of blood-thirsty tigers and hyenas, struck the ear from a distance, and

excited a feeling of horror. The Israelites had been accustomed to something very different. In the pleasant land of Goshen, the case had been otherwise—fruitfulness and pleasing scenery, fields, gardens, and meadows, rivers, and pools, abounded every where. Unhappily, they began to draw comparisons, and by these, an evil or a good is either made greater or less. If a great good is compared with one still greater, it loses in our estimation; and so it is with an evil. If we reflect that it might be much worse, it becomes more tolerable. But when the evil is compared with the opposite good, it becomes more grievous, even as black laid upon white appears still blacker. In hell, the rich glutton thought a drop of water a good blessing, who previously would not have esteemed the most costly wine as such. If the sight of the misery of Lazarus had contributed to increase his enjoyment when on earth, by comparing his own health and ease with it—so the sight of the glory he enjoyed in heaven must have increased his torment.

The children of Israel also drew a comparison. But what kind of one? In the burning desert, they call to mind the cooling cucumbers, and the juicy, pleasant, and well-flavoured water-melons. The thought of these things, it must be confessed, may well make the mouth water whilst traversing the burning sand. The Egyptian fish came also unfortunately to mind, as well as the savoury leeks, onions, and garlic. There they had them for nought—here nothing of the kind was to be had, even for its weight in gold.

Let us not be unjust towards them, but confess that the temptation was not a small one to flesh and blood.

In one respect there was nothing sinful in the idea, that they would gladly now have gathered up the melons, which perhaps in Egypt they had trampled under foot, and have considered the fish as a dainty which there they disregarded. But this became sin to them, because they desired them in an inordinate, violent manner, and out of, nay even in opposition to the divine order. What did they not lose sight of in doing so? was not Canaan promised them, where they should have these things in abundance? Should they therefore refuse to wait a little longer, since in the course of a few days or weeks they might arrive there, seeing that they were travelling towards it, and had already accomplished more than half the distance—not considering that they were the people, from whom was to come salvation, and out of whom a seed should rise up, in whom all the nations of the earth should be blessed—not considering that what they endured and were deprived of, would be to their own advantage, and that of the whole world—not reflecting that they were really not in want of any thing necessary. Did God, his guidance, his promise, and his will appear to them of so little value, and melons, onions, and garlic all to them? Was every thing forgotten, which had been done to them and for them? How disgustingly does their gloomy, earthly and carnal-mindedness manifest itself! They imagine themselves in extreme misery.

And how dreadful must the state of similarly minded individuals eventually be, who cling with their whole soul to earthly and sensual objects, neither knowing nor desiring any thing better, when once they are called into eternity, where they will meet with not the smallest thing after which they long, and where

they will consequently sink into utter destitution!— But the saints also long for juicy fruits whilst travelling through the desert. And of what kind? Such as grow in the heavenly Canaan. Their souls thirst, it is true; but it is after the living God. “When,” is their language, “when shall I appear before him!” Yet something inordinate may insinuate itself, even here. Paul would gladly have been freed from the thorn in the flesh; but he was obliged to accommodate himself to it, and let grace suffice him.

Who would not always be willing to enjoy cooling fruit? Who would not gladly continually bear about with him a cheerful assurance of the favour of God? Who would not gladly have his heart continually filled with love to God and to the Lord Jesus? Who would not willingly always feel, that the Lord was mighty in his weakness? Who would not gladly dispense with outward sufferings and inward trials; or else, if kept in them, be not only patient in tribulation, but even glory in it? In this respect also it is necessary that we deny ourselves, and this is perhaps a species of self-denial, which is totally impracticable without the Lord’s special assistance. Better it is, however, to renounce the idea of eating fruit in the desert, for bread merely is promised to be given us and that our water shall be sure. However, we may still occasionally reach a grove of palms, and finally arrive at Canaan.

But the worst of all was, that the discontented people were even dissatisfied with the heavenly manna. “Our soul is dried away,” said they, “we see nothing but this manna before us.” Disgusting expression of the corruption of the human heart! They tread the goodness of God under foot, as it were, and cast it

from them with disdain. Their descendants acted in the same manner towards him, of whom the manna was a type, and who presented himself to them as the living bread, that giveth life unto the world. *

And do not we tread exactly in their steps, although we call ourselves Christians? The simple and saving doctrines of the gospel are loathed as light food, and the wisdom and power of man is attempted to be set up in the place of Christ. Hence Paul felt constrained to warn true Christians not to be carried away from the simplicity which is in Christ, nor to be moved about by every wind of doctrine. And this admonition is especially needful in our day.

There was something very peculiar with respect to the manna, especially that it could be kept over the Sabbath, but on other days, was found fetid and worm-eaten the next morning. It was therefore obliged to be gathered fresh six days in the week, but on the sixth day, a double quantity for the Sabbath, on which day, none fell. Now this might not be a very difficult matter, yet it placed them in a state of great dependance, which is just the reverse of what nature seeks. The temptation in paradise was, "ye shall be as gods," and it succeeded. Such is the tendency of our nature still, which obeys only from necessity.

The divine commands alone are not able to render human nature, which is compared to a hard and insensible stone, soft, pliant, and tractable. On the contrary, they bring its obstinacy to light. The Scriptures say, to be carnally-minded is to be at enmity with God, and that the carnal mind cannot be rendered subject to the law of God. Nor can the life of the Christian, generally speaking, be agreeable to nature,

because of its constant and ever increasing dependance upon God and his grace. Doubtless, it would have better pleased the Israelites, if they had not for years together been equally poor every morning. But God had intentionally so arranged it. It did not lay in the nature of the manna, that it only kept a day, otherwise it would not have remained good from Friday till Sunday. And this divine arrangement had doubtless its object; which could be no other, than to preserve the children of Israel in a state of continual dependance upon the Lord, and to exercise them in fixing their hopes entirely in him. He that regards this as a rule of easy observance, must be little acquainted with himself. Not merely at the hour when it is required, but beforehand, and that not merely in faith, but in real possession, is what all desire. We would rather be perfect in ourselves than in Christ. But if thou wilt be a true disciple of Jesus, provide thyself only with an empty vessel, and habituate thyself to spiritual poverty. Establish within thee a firm confidence, that the strong young lions shall suffer hunger, sooner than that they, who fear the Lord, shall want any good thing. Learn to understand that great and evangelical expression—"as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing all things." The needful manna will not be wanting, though it may not fall in abundance. If thou continuest poor, and seest thyself beset with difficulties on every side, let his grace be sufficient for thee; for his strength is powerful in the weak.

But to what lengths did the children of Israel carry their discontent? It is said, "they sat down and wept." For what reason? On account of the cir-

cumstances in which they were placed, their want of melons and flesh meat. This was being deeply afflicted, and yet all about earthly things! But such is also the case with the worldly-minded. What makes them glad, but earthly things! What causes them grief, but earthly things! What calls their powers into activity? The same motive; whilst every thing respecting their soul's salvation gives them no concern. True it is, that even real Christians may mourn over earthly and temporal objects; for they are not stones. Jesus himself wept at the grave of Lazarus. But they moderate their grief, and humble themselves under the will of God. They have other and superior objects, which cause them joy as well as sorrow, for they are spiritually-minded.

The grief of the Israelites degenerated even into a repugnance against God, and into rebellion. According to Psalm lxxviii. they not only asked, "Who will give us flesh to eat?" but, with incredible audacity, challenged him, saying, "Is God able to spread a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also, can he provide flesh for his people?" But these were wicked thoughts and abominable expressions, highly derogatory to God. It was monstrously irrational to allow that God had performed one miracle, and to regard another as impossible; since it was an easy matter to him, as the result showed, to give them flesh in abundance, without working a direct miracle. Would it not have been very natural to have thought thus:—"He who could give water out of the barren rock, can also give us flesh in the desert, if he pleases." And what seems

easier than such a conclusion? Is man so wicked and blinded, that he is even incapable of reasoning thus? For why should we not extend this particular case to mankind in general, since the Apostle expressly says, in 1 Cor. x. 6, that these things were for an example for us? Do we act in a better manner? Christ says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." But do not the children of men act as if this did not in the least concern them, without deducing a single motive from it for their own government? "Repent!" it is said. But how often and how long has this been said, without their asking themselves, "What am I doing?" "Seek first the kingdom of God," it is said. But who troubles himself about it? They have no ear to hear, no eye to see, nor any heart to understand; and to this day the Lord has not given it them, otherwise they would act very differently.

But you, whose hearts are not yet hardened, call to mind that God spared not his only begotten Son, but gave him up for you; the inference you ought to draw from this is, "How shall he not with him also freely give us all things!" Do you make this deduction? It is said, "He careth for you." Do you, therefore, cast all your care upon him? What degree of power has his word in you? O Lord! quicken me according to thy word! Amen.

XXI.

THE PUNISHMENT OF DISCONTENT.

NUMB. xi. 1—4, 10—15.

“ And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord ; and the Lord heard it, and his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

“ And the people cried unto Moses, and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched.

“ And he called the name of the place Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

“ And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting ; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, who shall give us flesh to eat ?

“ Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent, and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly ; Moses also was displeased.

“ And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant ? And wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me ?

“ Have I conceived all this people—have I begotten them, that thou shouldst say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the suckling child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers ?

“ Whence should I have flesh to give to all this people ; for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

“ I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

“ And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness.”

WE have recently been considering the discontented state of the people. We now proceed to discuss its cause and effect.

What was the reason that the Israelites were so dissatisfied, and expressed themselves so impiously? Alas! all had not perished in the Red Sea, who ought to have been drowned in it. There was with the children of Israel, a people who bore the curious name of Haasaphsoph, which is well rendered by the expression, “ a mixed multitude.” What kind of a people they were, I cannot say. They were distinguished from the children of Israel, and were, therefore, no descendants of Abraham. In Nehemiah, the term implies the Ammonites and Moabites, who, according to a divine regulation, were never to form a part of the people of God. But what the people were, who are here meant, it is difficult to decide. However, they were the cause of temptation, sin, and consequent punishment to the children of Israel.

This “ mixed multitude ” is still to be met with in spiritual Israel, and that in a two-fold respect.

First, the christian church originally consisted entirely of true christians, regenerate, and believers. The dreadful persecutions they experienced, prevented any other than such as were really sincere, and taught of God, from joining them, or else such individuals were separated from them again by these very persecutions, which no one could endure without being in actual possession of grace and spiritual life. They were not

of them, otherwise they would have continued with them. Although, for a time, they might have assumed the christian name, yet they continued to belong to judaism, heathenism, the world, and the powers of darkness. Their apostacy was, therefore, no loss, but a gain. Yet even at an early period, all kinds of tares mingled themselves with the wheat, which could not be hindered, but was, nevertheless, to be lamented. But when, at length, external and worldly advantages were connected with Christianity, and some were even compelled by fire and sword to assume it—the number of the heathen diminished greatly, whilst that of nominal Christians increased amazingly; but truth, godliness, and the kingdom of God gained little by it.

An immense “mixed multitude” accompanied the Israelites, and mingled with them far too much. The christian church became like a net, full of good fish and bad, or like a field, where tares and wheat grow together, so much so even that the wheat is scarcely perceptible on account of the quantity of tares, and godliness because of abounding ungodliness. But such a mixed multitude is unfit for the service of God, and at length a separation takes place, the wheat from the chaff, the former being gathered into the barn, the latter cast into the fire. The church of God is not increased by marriage nor by confirmation, but by a birth from God. The majority of those who call themselves Christians, have no real right to that appellation, but belong to the “Haasaphsuph.”

There have been those in all ages, who by a strict church-discipline, have endeavoured to amend this deplorable state of things, and were desirous of gathering churches consisting entirely of true Christians;

but they failed in both respects. The penalties which the church enjoins, are of that nature, as to be no punishment to the majority, but that which they prefer; since they consist solely of excluding the individual from its fellowship and the sacrament. But from these the wicked and unbelieving abstain of themselves, and would regard it in the light of a punishment, if they were compelled to attend the preaching of the word and to partake of the sacrament. Other little penances, formerly enjoined, are now become obsolete. We are, therefore, left secretly to grieve and pray over the breach made in Zion, and the wound of Joseph, and do what we are able. The Lord will at length send those, who shall fill up the gaps, and repair the ways, and will visit the transgressors with heavy judgments, and at length with the judgment day, when he will separate the sheep from the goats. Meanwhile, let every one be diligent to become a Christian, an anointed one, not merely in name, but in deed, and in truth.

Even as this "mixed multitude" did not perish with Pharaoh in the Red Sea, but adhered to the Israelites and accompanied them, so in the justification of life, though sin may have for ever lost its damning and controuling power through the blood and the Spirit of Christ in true believers, yet Scripture and experience teach us, that, even in the latter, the flesh or carnal will still exists together with the spirit, and that these are opposed to each other; that with the new man, there is still an old man, who must be crucified and slain by the former. And in the strife between the two, the deep depravity of the human heart, the utter inability of the natural will to the performance of that

which is good, the horrible power of sin, the insufficiency of the law, and all our own efforts, the craft of the devil, and the inexpressible necessity of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as his suretyship, and the victorious power of his Spirit, are made manifest.

The behaviour of the lustful people, made Moses, who took no part in it, apprehensive of evil consequences. And he had cause; for the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly. He had immediate recourse to punishment, and sent out a fire amongst them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp; and hence the place was called *Taberah*, or burning, as also *Kibroth-hattaavah*, or the graves of lust. God, in this instance, is angry according to the spirit of the law; and O, how far do its requirements extend—how unlimited is the holiness of God! No evil work has yet been committed. They had merely lusted, and that too after something which was by no means evil in itself. Certainly some wicked words were used, which were offensive to God, whom they challenged to work a miracle, if he were able; and here the assertion proved true, “Be not deceived; God does not suffer himself to be mocked.” But yet how frequently does this occur, and what would become of mankind, if they were always to be punished in such a manner, as he inflicted it upon his chosen people! How many excuses might have been made; but nothing of the kind was listened to, however plausible it might sound. The law says, “Thou shalt not covet;” for desire is sin, and ought never to enter into our hearts. And “cursed is every one, who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.”

Hence we see how very deficient men are in the true and correct idea of sin and its lawlessness and culpability. If they do much, they grant, it is true, that this or that act is sin, a transgression of the law, and yet maintain that it may be committed, without the individual being on the whole a wicked man, and possessing a perverse and evil heart. Words are made light of, and they are far from believing, that for every idle word they may have spoken, they are punished in the sight of God; for the deity the world figures to itself is a wretched being, which it neither fears nor loves, and from whom—speaking seriously—it expects neither good nor evil. But that lust should be sin, it will by no means allow; yet, notwithstanding, it does not cease to be true, that even lusting and desiring is a damnable sin,

However, it is nothing surprising, that this should not be recognized. Even the Apostle Paul acknowledges that there had been a period of his life, in which he also, by reason of the blindness of his heart, had not perceived this. And hence he succeeded in regarding himself as blameless with respect to the law, because he did not transgress the other nine commandments in an outward manner. But how was he astonished, when his eyes were opened to see that even lust or desire was sin! This gave him, so to speak, the key to the whole gospel, and no man was more joyful at its contents than he, when it revealed to him the righteousness which avails in the sight of God, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, whom he had previously so violently opposed. When you begin with him to understand and know that desire is sin, you will also grieve with him on account of it,

very gladly flee to Christ, and, like Paul, place an inestimable value upon him. But that lustful desire is sin, and worthy of death, the present portion of Scripture teaches us in a very striking manner, if we are only susceptible of teaching, and willing to be taught.

The requirements of God are of great extent. We must on all occasions renounce our own will, and obey, without the smallest contradiction, the only good will of God; we must, if called upon, part with even our most harmless wishes, and willingly endure the most painful sufferings and privations. But who is sufficient for these things, unless God enable him? We must nevertheless be seriously concerned to become a perfect man, ready to every good work through faith in Jesus Christ. The Christian ought to learn to submit to every thing, accommodate himself to every thing, and assent to every thing—sin excepted.

The occurrence in the camp displeased Moses, and rendered him anxious. He raises a complaint, and pours it out in many words, as we read in verses 11—15, which do not evidence much faith in the sight of the Lord. He seems to himself too incapable for that which he has to perform, and thus thinks of himself in the abstract. He first of all complains that the Lord is not gracious enough to him. "Wherefore," asks he, "have I not found favour in thy sight?" Thus expressing a formal doubt of the Lord's good pleasure towards him: nor is it any uncommon or singular phenomenon, that persons who have received the most powerful and all-pervading assurances of the divine favour, are afterwards assailed by violent

scruples, which, however, prove nothing against the correctness of such assurances. For doubts are no proofs. This sometimes arises from faults committed ; at other times not so. Yet even this is salutary for many reasons. The Christian ought not to place his confidence in the assurances he may have received, but solely in Christ ; and as soon as the former prevents the latter, it is good that it be assailed. It is also useful in promoting humility. He learns to know his weakness, that he may cleave the more closely to that, which he supposed he held so firmly—his dependance upon the Lord ; seeing that “ no man can receive any thing, except it be given him from above.”

Moses however, thinks that God is not sufficiently gracious to him, otherwise God would not have laid the burden of all the people upon him ; and asks, “ Wherefore dost thou afflict thy servant ? ” It is no singular or unheard-of case, that believers may also imagine, if God were gracious to them he would avert from them such sufferings, trials, and temptations, as those by which they are surrounded ; and they are unable to make the two agree. They are also ready to say, “ If I have found favour in thy sight, wherefore dost thou thus afflict thy servant ? ” How is it possible that, if this were the case, I should have so much to suffer and endure ?—that I should experience such feelings of unbelief and corruption—that all my prayers find so little hearing, and that my trials are of such a kind, duration, and violence ? Ought nothing whatever, therefore, to induce us to doubt of his love, even in the smallest degree ?

If we reflect on the fate of the primitive Christians, and would measure the Lord's favour to them by their

persecution, must we not rather regard them as objects of his wrath than of his love, seeing that they were treated as sheep for the slaughter, and killed all the day long?

And how does it stand with them inwardly? Is it always Sunday, Easter, Ascension-day, Pentecost, and Christmas? or is there also a time of fasting as in Lent? Is it always summer, or is there also a rude autumn—always sunshine, or sometimes gloomy days, storm, and tempest? Do all true Christians invariably experience that the kingdom of God is righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; or are they likewise conscious that they must enter into it through much tribulation? Read of Job, hear a David, listen to a Jeremiah. See how gloomy, contracted, and oppressed their hearts frequently appear, and learn from them, that the grace which rules over an individual, may suffer him to feel in such a manner, as to make him infer wrath rather than love from it. How does it sound, when Job says, “The arrows of the Almighty pierce me, his arrows drink up my spirit. Thine eyes look upon me, therefore I am consumed. When I say, my bed shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint, then thou scarest me with dreams and terrifiest me through visions!” or when David says, “I am afflicted, and ready to die from my youth up, while I suffer thy terrors, I am distracted!”

And are all these no proofs to the contrary of divine love? Are we to believe and hope, when nothing is to be hoped for? Shall we regard the evil day, as if it were a good day?

O Lord, do thou strengthen us! Without thee we

can do nothing ; but all things when thou enablest us. He that is not a Christian is wretched in the midst of prosperity. The Christian is happy in the midst of suffering. For the Lord will deliver and honour him. “ Nevertheless, I am still with thee ! ” Amen.

XXII.

THE COMPLAINT ANSWERED.

NUMB. xi. 11—20.

“ And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant ? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me ?

“ Have I conceived all this people ? Have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers ?

“ Whence should I have flesh to give to all this people ? For they weep unto me, saying, ‘ Give us flesh, that we may eat.’

“ I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

“ And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight, and let me not see my wretchedness.

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people and officers over them ; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

“ And I will come down and talk with thee there, and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee and will put it upon them ; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

“ And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow, and ye shall eat flesh : (for ye have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt ;) therefore the Lord will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.

“ Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days.

“ But even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome to you ; because that ye have despised the Lord which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?”

AT the first reading of this prayer, of this conversation of Moses with the Lord, we are struck with its uncommon confidence and frankness. He speaks as a friend to a friend, not as a servant to his master ; as a child to his father, and not as a subject to his king.

He asks, “ Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant ?” His whole life appears to him but as a series of troubles, even, as in the following chapter, he represents himself as tried above all other men. Nor was he entirely in the wrong. In his tender infancy, his life was in jeopardy, and he was only saved by a miracle. And in maturer years how critical was his situation, being obliged to live in the splendour of the court, where he might easily have lost the jewel entrusted to him ! How must his faith have inwardly struggled, in order to esteem the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt ! and although this ceased, when he felt compelled to leave the court, yet what were the plains of Midian—what were his occupations, which consisted solely in feeding Jethro’s

flocks, for one who had been educated and brought up in such a manner, habituated to the most refined luxury, and for an individual of such attainments? He who, as it is said, commanded armies, and was esteemed as a prince of the blood, became a poor shepherd, and continued so from his fortieth year, when he was in his prime, until his eightieth! How intolerably tedious, we are ready to say, for such a man as he! If the thought was retained in his soul, that God would deliver Israel by his means, how enthusiastic must such an idea have appeared to him, and as a mockery at himself, now become old and grey-headed. Did he not probably strive against it, and think, that though formerly a prince and generalissimo, he must after all die a mere shepherd, and all his ideas of the deliverance of Israel by his hand have been regarded as a vain chimera? But though it turned out otherwise, and he had now led forth Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness, what was the result? "Labour and sorrow," as he himself says in the ninetieth Psalm.

"Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant?" What is the reason why I have to endure so much, and that, in my case, the clouds return after the rain? This "wherefore?" is, doubtless, frequently uttered. At one time it has reference to the occurrences that befall us; at another, to the circumstances in which the affliction happens to us; as well as, frequently, the intentions and objects which God has in view in sending us sufferings; the utility of which does not always immediately appear, but only in the sequel, and perhaps, only fully in glory. It may also become a subject of painful consideration to the individual, why he alone should be thus chastised and exercised? Would

to God, exclaims Job, ye were in my place! Asaph also, could not be satisfied, why such a particularly pious man as he esteemed himself to be, should be chastised every morning, whilst others, as he imagined, were not plagued like him. The Apostle Peter found it necessary to remind those to whom he wrote, that the same afflictions were accomplished in their brethren that were in the world; and the tried Christian finds such a consideration useful to him, even in the present day.

Moses complains of his difficult vocation, and says, “Wherefore hast thou laid the burden of all this people upon me? and sayest to me, carry this people on thine arm, as a nurse carries an infant, unto the land, which thou swarest unto their fathers. Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? I am not able to bear all this people alone; it is too heavy for me.” Poor Moses! he puts into one scale the work he has to accomplish, and his own strength into the other, and then all courage forsakes him. The result was, I am not able to do it. From the sequel it would appear, that his eye had become so obscured, that it seemed to him, as if no one could do it.

We leave Moses, and remark, that it is good and necessary to take a minute view of that which is incumbent upon us, particularly as Christians, in all its extent, significancy, and importance, and duly to measure out the strength and ability inherent in us for its accomplishment; from whence a humbling but very salutary inference is to be drawn. Let us then in some degree consider our work, and our strength and ability for it.

Great, significant, and important is the work incum-

bent upon us as Christians, which will soon become evident to us on a little reflection. Let us only consider, that it is our duty to attain to such a state, as that we shall not feel ashamed to appear before the judgment seat of Christ at the last great day, and hear a joyful sentence pronounced from that supreme and final tribunal, from whence there is no appeal. What an important work !

Let us consider that it is incumbent upon us, not only to suppress the gross manifestations of sinful passion, and to lay aside single considerable failings, but that the whole of the old man, with his affections and lusts, is to be entirely laid aside and slain, so that no thought or desire contrary to any of God's commands ever even arise in us, much less insinuate and establish itself. What a laborious task !

Let us reflect, that when even this is accomplished, yet the greater half is still left undone ; and that now the love of God and our neighbour must entirely rule in us, so that the latter must be at least equal to the love each one bears to himself, whilst his love to God must far exceed it. We must be ready for every good work, and every where approve ourselves as the servants of God. How great the undertaking !

We must, at the same time, not forget the hindrances and difficulties, which oppose themselves to the accomplishment of this work. Suppose the world should no longer cause us so much trouble, and neither its pleasure nor its wealth, its commendation nor its censure, particularly affect us any more, yet how will we be able to accomplish our task, since we find in our very selves the most powerful opposition ? How shall a cripple walk ? Who can bring a clean thing out of an un-

clean? Evil proceeds from ourselves; and how shall we stop up this source, or rather transmute it, that it may yield sweet water instead of bitter? For we require a new heart.

If, besides all this, we consider that an invisible but mighty power tries to oppose us at every turn; a power which sometimes dazzles, and at others incites and impels, lulls to sleep, and tries to ensnare; and that we have to combat and overcome the whole dreadful host of the infernal powers—what do we then think of our work?

We must not, however, conceal its extent from our view, but, previously, count the cost for this great building and work, and consider how it may be accomplished. Moses looked at the whole affair as if committed to him; but declared it was too much for him. Such was also the Lord's intention. It was to be carried to the point of impossibility on his part, and was really so. "I am not able to stand it alone," said he. And such will be also the result with all serious Christians, who are desirous, not merely of hearing and talking, but of being *doers* of the word.

But such characters will not rest in their own insufficiency; on the contrary, it will powerfully incite them, not to say merely, I am not able, but rather, "I can do all things,"—I can overcome every thing. For there is a people that can say, with one and the same breath, "I am weak; but when I am weak, then am I strong." If they have not the strength in themselves, they have it in another, and they are strong in his strength—"strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

Moses, in his trials, acts as a person ought to do; he

takes refuge with the Lord, and lays before him all his sorrows. Nor does he complain in vain : the Lord first lightens his burden, by commanding him to choose out seventy men, upon whom he will put his spirit, and associate them with Moses, that he may not bear the whole burden alone. The Lord is the proper person to afford at least relief, in some way or other to the distressed mind, if he will not entirely deliver it.

We meet here again with the number seventy, which had already occurred at Elim. Christ had also the same number of disciples whom he sent forth, beside the apostles. We find here likewise a type of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, at the solemn opening of the New Testament dispensation, on the apostles, and through them on many thousand others. It soon began to be evident, that the Spirit had been communicated to these seventy men, for they began to prophesy, and ceased not. He that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his ; but wherever he comes, he produces a very evident change. It may even be said of such a one, “ he begins to prophesy ;” not, indeed, as predicting future things, but inasmuch as he begins to speak of himself and divine things in a manner conformable to the Word of God, and seeks also to lead other souls to Christ.

Of the seventy men who were selected, two remained in the camp, prevented by some circumstance or other from appearing, as they ought to have done, before the tabernacle with the rest. Certain, however, it is, they did not omit it from any evil motive. Hence they also partook of the Spirit imparted to the others, and began to prophesy in the camp. Their names were Eldad—the love of God, and Medad—moderation ; two things

which must not be wanting. A boy, perceiving the change in them, and their prophesying, ran and told Moses of it. It happened that Joshua, the servant of Moses, who was constantly with him, heard this news, and was immediately ready with his advice. "My lord Moses, forbid them!" cried he. It was his self-love which suggested this advice, and this self-love sought its nourishment in the incomparable greatness of Moses. Doubtless he thought something of himself, and we may add, not without reason; for being, as it were, Moses' shadow, which accompanied him every where, that which detracted from the authority of Moses detracted also from his; for such is the nature of self-love, it seeks to promote its own advantage by every possible means.

Thus, John's disciples, for the same reason, wished to depreciate Jesus with their master, by saying, "Lo, he whom thou baptizedst, baptizes also, and all men come unto him!" But John answered, "He must increase, but I must decrease." He was therefore far from partaking of the selfish, ambitious sentiments of his disciples; and Moses was like-minded. He repelled, in a sacred manner, the temptation presented him by his friend and servant, and said, "Enviest thou for my sake? Is my advantage, and my honour, thy chief motive? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!" Certainly nothing could be more desirable than such an event. What can be compared to it? Nothing. What knowledge, godliness, and love, what peace and joy would then dwell upon the earth! "Mercy and truth would meet together, righteousness and peace would kiss each other." The words of Moses therefore ought reasonably to be the prayer of every one, both for himself and for

others ; especially since the Holy Spirit is promised to them that ask him.

“ O that thou wouldst rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence !” O that all the Lord’s people prophesied, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them !

XXIII.

THE INCREDULITY OF MOSES REPROVED.

NUMB. xi. 21—23.

“And Moses said, The people among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen ; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month.

“Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to suffice them?

“And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.”

WE have lingered long in Taberah, we will now prepare for our departure, but previously consider the incredulity of Moses, with respect to the divine assurance, and the reproof he received.

We will first direct our attention to the divine promise. A preparation, however, was requisite ; for it was said, Sanctify yourselves against the morrow, be prepared for it, keep your minds in an appropriate frame, expect it with certainty, and rejoice in the anticipation of it. This is a suitable preparation with reference to promises in general ; but it becomes a duty when they present themselves to us, as in a visible manner in the holy sacraments. The promises also

generally require patience, the more so, the greater and more excellent they are. Here the people had not long to wait—only till the next morning. Yet still, even so short a period, may sometimes seem long to us.

The cause and occasion of the promise was not a very pleasing one. “Ye have wept in the ears of the Lord,” it is said, “since ye say, who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt, (and why did he need to bring us out of it?) and ye have rejected the Lord.” It was therefore a promise and a bestowment, not in grace, but in wrath; not to benefit, but to destroy. And is not this still frequently the case? Is the noble blessing of health a benefit or an injury to those who abuse it to commit crimes; and would not many a one have escaped a misfortune had he been ill? Have not the great abilities and learning of many become a snare to them? And what is there, that is beneficial to man, except the Lord impart his blessing with it; and when he does so, what would be detrimental to him?

Israel’s weeping entered into the Lord’s ears. What would you think, if your laughter and revelling, your words and actions came to the ears of the Lord? what would be the result?—favour or displeasure—a friendly or a frowning face? If this weeping, which was evidently not without reason, was so displeasing to the Lord, think ye that your ungodly doings will be a matter of indifference to him? Or do you not suppose that God has ears that hear every thing, eyes that see every thing, and a book in which all things are written? He that made the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? But ye that

weep in Israel, be assured that he counts your tears. Their number must indeed be complete ; but at length the last will be wept, and then eternal joy shall succeed. “Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh.” But woe unto you that laugh now ; for ye shall mourn and weep.

The promise itself was to the effect that they should have flesh in abundance, not for a few days only, but for a whole month. Yet this should not afford them pleasure, but loathing. They had said of the manna, “Our soul loatheth this light food,” and now they would be compelled to say so in a still greater degree with respect to the flesh, after which they had longed, and gladly content themselves with the manna again. “Be content with such things as ye have,” says Paul ; who had learned in whatever situation he was, therewith to be content. God can replace that which is wanting of creature good ; but no creature can replace God, if he be wanting. Therefore thirst after God !

The manna of the gospel is just as disgusting to many, as the manna of the wilderness to the Jews. They long for the Egyptian flesh of human wisdom, which is not according to Christ, but the world. But O how loathsome will this become to you, if it should please God to extend his mercy towards you, and grant you repentance ! How would you long for the gospel ye have despised, if the mercy were vouchsafed to you, of feeling the pressure of your sins !

Such was the promise given by the Lord, whose honour was assailed. It was determinate—it was great. It seemed impracticable. This reminds us of the great promises of the gospel, which are, the entire forgiveness of sins, and even of that sinful nature, with which

the Christian has to struggle—a complete and perfect sanctification and renovation, in which all that is sinful is as entirely banished from the soul, as the night by the rising of the sun—a preservation so powerful, that no one can pluck them out of Jesus' hands, when once in them, for they shall never perish—a preservation so minute and circumstantial, that not a hair shall fall unnoticed from their heads; and so certain, that the “mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed,” rather than the Lord's favour from his people—an omnipotent assistance, so that when they pass through the waters, the Lord is with them, and through the floods, yet they shall not overflow them.—An acceptance to the adoption of children and the heritage of God.

But it is very easy to act in such a manner towards these great things, as Moses did with reference to the divine promise. He entered into a rational scrutiny of it; the result of which was, “how can such a thing be?” and closely connected with this was the idea, it *cannot* be! and yet, such an idea was to possess greater validity than the divine promise itself! Wretched incredulity! especially in one who was the mediator of the old covenant—in him who stands amongst the first in the list of believing heroes in Heb. xi. He well understood the promise, since it had reference merely to outward things, and could therefore be comprehended by the natural understanding, without the aid of superior light. It had reference to flesh. That they should have this the day following, and that for a whole month together in the greatest abundance, seemed to him something great, as it really was. And how great and astonishing is that which we have just

quoted from the covenant of grace? Is it not more than a weak and contracted human heart is able to comprehend and receive?

Reason now set before Moses the difficulties which lay in the way of the fulfilment of this promise. Of Abraham it is said, that "he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was fully persuaded, that what he had promised he was able also to perform." This could not be said of Moses on this occasion, but the contrary. His reason reminded him of the number and the means, and thus deprived him of his faith. The number of the people first presented itself to his view, which, without such as were under twenty years of age, doubtless without the women also, amounted to six hundred thousand footmen, exclusive of the rabble of whom we recently spoke. And this immense number was to eat flesh for a whole month! This was hard to believe. Let us, therefore, not think so slightly of those, who either cannot believe the Bible, or at least not the whole of it. Nor is it such an easy matter. Moses himself, in this instance, did not believe all. It is true they had brought much cattle with them out of Egypt, yet it would have required fifteen hundred even to be slain daily to afford a moderate portion unto each. Thus their cattle would have been all consumed; and it could not have been correctly said God had given them flesh. Numbers embarrassed Moses, and are they not capable still of crippling, or at least of restraining faith? The number of sins, which seemed to many of the saints to exceed the hair of their heads, and even the sand on the sea-shore; the great number of those who walk towards

perdition; and the small number of those who find the way to life, may be a source of disquietude to a troubled soul.

The means for the accomplishment of the divine promise, likewise excited perplexity in the mind of Moses, and both together caused unbelief to take up arms. Moses does not show himself as a child, but as a prudent man; who, when he sees no way or means for the accomplishment of the promise, imagines that there are none in existence. Was this humility? Was this child-like? or the consideration of what God is, and what man? The prudent calculator thought of oxen and fish, but of birds, which are also flesh, he thinks not. At the same time he exaggerates in asking, "Shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together to suffice them?" In short, it seems impossibility itself. What, is not God's will sufficient to realize every thing? Is his arm shortened, so that it can no longer extend itself? Are his words to be of no more value to us than our own thoughts?

Well, you are at liberty boldly to triumph over Moses, if you can mend the matter. When you are in distress, do you confidently believe he can and will deliver you, or else overrule every thing for the best? When you see no longer any way of escape, do you rejoice at the conviction, that he can call into existence that which is not? You answer in every case, and even in the most difficult, "We are able to do it through Christ;" and then every difficulty is solved. If your sins set themselves in array against you, you can point to his blood, and their clamours are mute; if the law, with its rigid and urgent demands, marches against

you, you oppose to it the shield of the righteousness of Christ ; and if your spiritual enemies are on the point of binding you, and exclaim, “ the Philistines be upon thee, Samson,” the Spirit of God immediately comes upon you, and every fetter is burst, as a flaxen thread in the flame of a candle, and you exclaim, strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, “ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that hath loved us !” and you are perfectly in the right. Go forwards in this your strength, and let nothing confuse nor confound you. But the case was otherwise with Moses this time, and who is not astonished at witnessing such incredulity, such blind prudence, and such temerity in this distinguished servant of God ! What amazing displays of divine power had he already witnessed, how great his knowledge of God, what confidential intercourse he enjoyed with him, and how every thing had been transacted without a medium, so that God had said himself to him, “ Thou hast found favour in my sight.” And yet all this could not prevent him from speaking so unadvisedly.

But here we see the grace of God, in faithfully restoring his servant, who here appears as a lost and wandering sheep. He puts a question to him in return, by which he reminds him of his power, and thus leads the mind of Moses back to the right point. “ Is the Lord’s hand waxed short ?” inquires he. How beneficial are such divine reminders to a desponding soul ; how do they raise the individual out of the mire, and set his feet on the dry land ! He may sometimes sink down in despair at the multitude of his sins ; and

how consoling is it then to be inwardly and powerfully reminded of the blood of Christ, which was shed to make reconciliation for us, of his strength in the "feeling of our weakness, and of his powerful aid in the consciousness of our misery." Then the soul regains its wings, and its youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord also informs Moses, that he himself shall experience it. "Thou shalt see now, whether my words come to pass unto thee, or not." A man like Moses ought to have reasonably believed without seeing, and to have hoped where nothing was to be hoped for. But Moses, as Moses, could as little do this, as any other person. Faith and unbelief end at length in sight and experience. The unbeliever will at length perceive with terror, that every thing is as the Word of God told him, when it predicted hell, eternal damnation, and a future judgment. So the believer shall at length be blissfully conscious of the truth of what he believed, and his hopes be turned into sight.

And thus was Moses restored. All his objections fell entirely away. He went to the people, and told them that they should have flesh to eat for a whole month. He no longer speculated upon the way or means by which the promise was to be fulfilled. He believed that what God had promised he would also perform. O pleasing change, when the mind is extricated from the multitudes of its own thoughts, and the comfortless confusion of its own reflections, and when it can place its confidence in the living God!

But lastly, it might be asked, why Moses mentions this of himself, since it is nothing to his praise, but might degrade him in the opinion of others? This

was the very object he wished primarily to obtain. He did not wish to be exalted above his real standing, nor desired praise, at least not at the expense of him to whom all praise belongs. He wishes it to be seen, that without the aid of divine grace he is no better than another man. Hence Paul also refers so frequently to his former errors, and when he commends himself, he rarely forgets to add, "Yet not I, but the grace that is in me." Humility, and an insight into our nothingness, augments with our growth in grace.

In thus informing us of his errors, he testifies at the same time how greatly we need the constant operation of divine influence, and how dependent we are upon it. Of what avail is all knowledge and even all experience of divine assistance, and every former assurance of his grace; what avails it, if we have believed a hundred times, and it is not given us at the moment when it is needed? We are then just as poor and wretched, as dark and dead as if we had previously known nothing, experienced nothing, nor ever believed; of which Moses is a proof in this instance. We are unable to do the smallest thing of ourselves, whether at the commencement or in the continuation, and therefore a very dependant life and conduct is much to be recommended.

The failings which the Scriptures relate to us, even of the holiest and most distinguished individuals, serve also as a proof that they too are saved only by grace, and that there is no other way to salvation, than the new and living way through Christ; that there is no other righteousness in which we can stand in the judgment, but that which Christ has purchased for us by

his perfect obedience, and which the penitent sinner apprehends in faith.

Let us, therefore, be lowly in heart, and wholly despair of ourselves, and hope to the end for the grace which shall be revealed to us at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

XXIV.

HAZEROTH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 17.

“ And they departed from Kibroth-hattaavah, and encamped at Hazeroth.”

At length we take our departure from Taberah, and encamp at Hazeroth, the thirteenth station. The Israelites had acted basely at the former place, and been punished for it. The multitude is lessened, for the Lord has slain many of them. “ These things were for our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.” (1 Cor. x. 16.)

This severe remedy, we will hope, will have proved effectual, so that the remainder will duly reflect and amend themselves, and that we shall have no more of similar grievous and divine manifestations. But I can give no assurance of this. There are children so naughty, that the rod cannot cure them, and the children of Israel are an obvious proof of the truth of the apostolic expression, that “ the law entered, that the

offence might abound." Moses, or the law, is not able to bring a single individual into the land of Canaan; on the contrary, they all die under him, and at length, he himself also. His office is terrible. It kills, it preaches damnation; it makes one requirement after another, and thereby incites to the very reverse. "One of the greatest privileges of the gospel consists in being delivered from, and dead to the law by faith, so "that we should serve in newness of the Spirit." (Rom. vii. 6.)

The continuation of our meditations on the Wanderings of Israel through the wilderness offers little that is pleasing, but much that is humiliating and dejecting. However, it is useful and necessary to perceive what even the best of men are without Christ.

The thirteenth encampment bears the name of Hazeroth, or the outer courts, doubtless because this place was not far from Canaan, from that part of the promised land allotted to the tribe of Judah, so that it required only a few miles more to reach the borders. What a desirable circumstance to be so near the end of their journey! They had traversed for nearly two years the most arid and horrible deserts; but these, with their fatigues, were now left behind, and the desirable country with all its pleasing anticipations lay close before them. Ought not every heart to have throbbed; every countenance to have looked more cheerful, and every mind to have exulted in the prospect? Probably when the wind blew from that quarter, they felt or thought they felt the refreshing country breeze, loaded with the odoriferous perfumes of Canaan. It was autumn, and the precious fruits were arriving at maturity, so that soon they might expect to feed upon

melons, oranges, grapes, figs, and pomegranates, after which they had so ardently lusted. How painful must have been any further delay, and how much they probably wished soon to be permitted to depart! Congratulations will have been heard on every side, and the sound of joy and gladness. How must they have felt ashamed of their murmurings and their impatience, and have rejoiced in the mercy and faithfulness of God! How will this joy have been their strength, and love have impelled them to avoid every thing which might have been displeasing to the Lord! In one word, never had their circumstances been so prosperous as here; and hence the name Hazeroth, or outer courts.

David, in the eighty-fourth Psalm alludes to a Hazeroth, when he says, "My soul longeth, yea even fainteth for the courts of the Lord," and in the eleventh verse, if we leave a word untranslated, "a day in Hazeroth is better than a thousand." The pious monarch, therefore, took great and peculiar pleasure in the courts of the Lord. We know that the tabernacle, and the temple in particular, have various courts, each lying higher than the other, and which were ascended by steps. The last court immediately before the temple, was destined for the priests who offered sacrifices there, on the altar of burnt offerings, and for the singers and musicians of the Levites, who sang psalms and hymns. The remaining courts were for the Israelites in general, as also for the devout heathens. From them could be seen the sacrifices which were offered, and the eye could penetrate into the door of the temple, which was kept continually open, and the ear listen to the music of the temple, which floated down towards it, and the singing of the psalms.

It was, therefore, nothing surprising that David took pleasure in abiding in such a place, even as was also the case with the pious Israelites in general, who went thither to pray; as we frequently perceive also from the writings of the New Testament. Even the solemn stillness which prevailed in this sacred place was very congenial to devotion, to which was also added the divine promise, that the Lord would bless Israel, where he recorded his name; so that believing Israelites never felt so much the nearness of the Lord as in these his courts. The sacrificial service afforded very important subjects for meditation, particularly to persons like David, to whom the Lord imparted the hidden wisdom that these were not the sacrifices of which he approved, but that he had opened the ears of a certain divine person, and prepared a body for him, to do his will. What pleasing impressions was it not calculated to make on the mind of the worshippers, when they reflected that this was the mansion and the place of their peculiar, though invisible, yet powerfully present king, who there revealed himself on the golden mercy seat! What an agreeable noise must it have been to them, when they heard the sound of the bells on the robe of the high priest, walking in the temple, knowing that they were then remembered before the Lord. No wonder that David gladly lingered in such a place.

The outer courts in themselves certainly did not produce this effect, although they might contribute to it, but that which the Lord there communicated, and which they there inwardly enjoyed. Of this inward enjoyment the pious monarch could say much, because he was acquainted with it from experience. "Thy word," says he, "is sweeter to me than honey, and

more precious than thousands of gold and silver; thou refreshest my soul, and makest me glad with thy countenance." Thus also the church of the Lord exclaims with Isaiah, and says with Mary, "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoiceth in God my Saviour."

We indeed possess no Hazeroth like that of which David sings, in the literal sense of the term. The magnificent worship of the Old Testament has disappeared, but only because the shadow has given place to the substance, and the type to the thing typified. It is certain that Christians must take up their daily cross, and that every day has its evil; it is true that through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God, and generally speaking, traverse the desert. But even as in the natural desert there was a pleasant Elim, and likewise an Hazeroth, where a day is better than a thousand—so in true religion, there are days of rejoicing and refreshment, which are of more value than all the enjoyments of sense and the pleasures of the world. There are first fruits of the Spirit, which are from time to time imparted to the believer for his consolation and encouragement. There are also seasons in which the air of heaven blows, as it were, upon the soul, dispelling every cloud, which the individual imbibes in full draughts, feels himself exalted and animated in all his powers, and becomes conscious that his youth is renewed like the eagle's when his plumes are again grown, so that he soars aloft. There are hours in which something of that celestial harmony pervades the heart, and inspires it with a degree of sublime devotion and adoration, to which it is unaccustomed. There are also seasons, the

glory of which cannot better be described, than by the Song of Solomon. Thus the three disciples on the mount of transfiguration, exclaimed, "It is good to be here!" Paul was caught up into the third heaven, where he heard unutterable things. And David rejoices, saying, "My cup runneth over."

These are extraordinary and singular things, which, however, occur with some souls; and even as they are obliged to pass through extremely deep waters of affliction and tribulation, so they are also made glad in an extraordinary manner. There have been instances in which their feelings have so overpowered them, that they have fainted away, and said with the bride in Solomon's Song, "I am sick of love." Did not John fall at the feet of the glorified Jesus as dead, and Mary Magdalen, with the exclamation, "Rabboni!" without being able to utter a word more?

We do not mention these extraordinary seasons as things which are indispensable, but as affording a hint respecting the great things which the christian religion can afford even in this life, as proved in the cases of certain individuals. Certain it is, that true Christians alone know what real joy is, which none but they experience either in time or eternity; for the water which Christ bestows, shall be in us a well of water, springing up into everlasting life. Mark, therefore, what great and glorious things may be attained! And yet you neglect and despise them, and follow after a shadow and a wandering light, that only leads you to destruction. Do so no longer, but stand in the ways and see, and ask for the right way, and walk therein; so shall ye find rest unto your souls. The Lord Jesus does not expect merely self-denial from us, but he also

grants joy ; he does not merely enjoin duties upon us, but gives us strength to fulfil them, and helps us to bear the burdens he imposes. If he afflicts, he also consoles us ; if he kills, he makes alive again. Therefore be wise enough to “ seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and every thing else shall be added unto you.”

But let us turn from the extraordinary communications vouchsafed at Hazeroth, and which are rare, and bestowed only on a few, to mention something more of those things which are nothing uncommon with the true Christian.

It is not a rare thing, that the people of God are rendered so inwardly happy in the midst of a variety of oppressive circumstances, both external and internal, that they do not feel the want of any good thing, and are able to say with the Psalmist, “ The Lord is my shepherd ; I shall not want.” David could lay himself down, and sleep very quietly, and awake equally tranquil, although ten thousands of people had set themselves against him. (Psalm iii. 5, 6.) Many a believer has been inwardly happy and free from care, although so poor, that he knew not where to find a supply for his necessities. He could, without anxiety, leave the Lord to provide ; and the Lord did provide.

How many a pious person has been violently sick, and full of pain and disease, but at the same time so joyful within, that it was even a pleasure to him, so to speak, to let pain do its utmost upon him, and willingly to bear it as long as the Lord should see fit. He can alleviate the greatest and most affecting losses, and even the pain occasioned by the vilest and most unjust treatment of every kind, so that the sufferer shall be

like the lark, warbling in the midst of the storm. In the same manner the Lord can satisfy the soul in the midst of inward privation. Jehoshaphat said, without feeling either distress or dismay, "In us there is no strength; for we know not what to do; but our eyes look unto thee." The believing soul can be well satisfied to be so poor in spirit, as to live solely on what is given to it; be unable to derive from itself a single good thought, produce a sigh, or speak a right word; be obliged to cleave entirely to the Saviour and his grace, and to live by faith. In such circumstances it would pain the individual to perform any thing as of himself, or even to make a hair white or black.

In this Hazeroth, these outer courts, Christians are frequently blessed in the use of the means of grace. It is true they are, in this respect, still frequently in Marah, where there is water enough, which, however, cannot be drunk. Yet sometimes a sermon is all spirit and life to them, so that they are compelled to say, "We do hear in our own language, the wonderful works of God." All is pure enjoyment and food, and the soul is all devotion. It is not the sermon itself, but the soul sits with Mary at Jesus' feet, and hears his words, and says with the bride, "This is the voice of my beloved." The preaching of the gospel then produces such blessedness, that the individual feels ready to pluck out his eyes for it, if it were required of him. Long does it afterwards resound in the soul, like the strongly touched chords of the harp! The individual is then truly in Hazeroth, and exclaims, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!"

Though the word of God may sometimes be as a dead letter, and the soul be like a sick person, who

loathes his food, yet how often is the reverse the case! The man feels within him the true expositor, the Holy Spirit, and thus the time arrives, of which Jesus says, that he will no longer speak to his disciples in parables, but declare to them openly of the Father. What light is then imparted to him; what great and glorious things does a single passage, yea, a single word, frequently contain; what grounds of faith, what heights and depths? The heart is then imbued with the love of Christ, and attains to the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. He has the unction, and knoweth all things. What does not such a one frequently feel at the reception of the sacrament, when the great mysteries contained in that simple act are unfolded to the astonished eye of the adoring soul! Truly the Lord is often present on such occasions, and there is the gate of heaven. Such a day at Hazeroth is better than a thousand.

It certainly cannot be denied, that prayer, this spiritual respiration of the soul, is not at all times equally easy; but it is also true, that the soul occasionally feels incited to pour out a prayer before the Lord, which causes astonishment even to itself, and of which it may be said, "my prayer is my enjoyment." If expressed in words, they are of the most tender and filial description; if in sighs, they are most fervent; if in tears, they spring from the very centre of the soul. If in intercession for others, they are most languishing; if petition, most confident; if thankfulness, most affecting; and if praise, most cordial. The eye of faith then looks through Christ, the open door of the temple,

into the sanctuary, and to the mercy seat through the opened veil; a foretaste of heaven is experienced, the air of which invigorates and refreshes.

The Christian celebrates a day at Hazeroth, when the Holy Spirit hovers in an especial manner upon the face of the waters; the bridegroom then is with him, why should he not rejoice? He scatters the gloomy clouds of doubt, and comes, like Noah's dove, with the olive-leaf of peace to the heart. Then the man is at rest, then he is at peace, and there the weary are refreshed. He is a sanctifying Spirit, and O how the fruits of the Spirit flourish under his reviving breath! and spring up themselves from the previously humbled and contrite heart, in which the High and the Lofty One resides. He guides into all truth, he glorifies Christ; and how great is the glory then revealed to the soul! Then the individual scruples no more to ask, "Who will accuse or condemn?" He does not find it too much to say, There is now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, nor to boast of being raised up together with him, and made to sit together in heavenly places. He sees the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world! And what a sight is that for a poor sinner! He regards God as just, and yet justifying the ungodly. He understands the perfect nature of the atonement, of which it is said, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto men the ministry of reconciliation." O certainly! he who attains to the understanding of this in the light of the Holy Spirit, desires to know nothing else but Christ and him crucified; by whom the world is crucified unto him,

and he to the world, and exclaims with David, "The sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest." He possesses the Spirit, which bears witness that he is a child of God, and has received him into his favour; and this he seals with such an invincible certainty, that neither man nor angel is able to shake it. As the Spirit of consolation, he also inundates the soul with the river of his pleasures, so that it hovers in the precincts of heaven, and exclaims with Paul, "I am abundantly comforted."

Such is the faint description of a day at Hazeroth. If it be so glorious in the outer courts, what must it be in the temple itself! Certainly these are spiritual joys, of which the spiritual man can alone be sensible. But they are sacred, real, and eternal joys. They are unknown to you as long as you are carnal. Cease, therefore, to be carnally minded, and become spiritual. For to be spiritually minded is life and peace, whilst to be carnally minded is death. Will you therefore not strive after the best gifts? Will you rather content yourselves like the prodigal son, with mere husks, which can only satisfy swine? O no! flee from such things! Lay hold on eternal life, to which you are called, and enter in at the strait gate into the kingdom of God, which consists in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

XXV.

MIRIAM'S LEPROSY.

NUMB. xii. and xxxiii. 18.

“ And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married ; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.

“ And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses ? Hath he not spoken also by us ? And the Lord heard it.

“ (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

“ And the Lord spake suddenly unto Moses, and unto Aaron, and unto Miriam, Come out, ye three, unto the tabernacle of the congregation.

“ And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud, and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forth.

“ And he said, Hear now my words ; If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

“ My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house.

“ With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches ; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold ; wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses ?

“ And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed.

“ And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle ; and behold

Miriam became leprous, white as snow ; and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold she was leprous.

“ And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my Lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

“ Let her not be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed, when he cometh out of his mother's womb.

“ And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee !

“ And the Lord said unto Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, should she not be ashamed seven days ? let her be shut out from the camp seven days, and after that let her be received in again.

“ And Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days ; and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

“ And they departed from Hazeroth and pitched in Rithmah.”

WE have now arrived, in our meditations, close upon Canaan, which lay only about half a league distant. Let us see what occurred there.

This is the fourteenth encampment. The events which took place are of a painful nature, but at the same time, admonitory and instructive. The Scriptures frequently refer to them. Let us therefore briefly consider these events, and then reflect upon the lesson they teach for all succeeding ages.

The first lamentable event, which is copiously treated of in the twelfth chapter, brings two persons before us, of whom we should least have expected it. Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses. Miriam is mentioned first, because she was probably the originator of the whole affair, and had infected her brother Aaron with her perverted views. Both of them united against Moses, as if he had not vexation sufficient. Hence he calls himself the most tried or the meekest

of men. It is very pleasing, that the word may be rendered both ways. It certainly sounds somewhat strange, that Moses should have so highly commended his own meekness, which would have been suffered to pass much easier, had he described his trials as excessively great. He, therefore, that takes umbrage at the former, may choose the latter, as Luther also does in his version. We, however, cannot think worse of Moses for mentioning his meekness, than of Paul in alluding to his faith, long-suffering, love, and patience. (2 Tim. iii. 10.) Saints, who make an open confession of their failings on the one hand, may be permitted also to mention their good qualities on the other, for their humility continues in both cases the same, since they ascribe the former to themselves, the latter to grace. In other respects, meekness, is not learned without trial, at least the former affords an opportunity of exercising the latter.

If the meekness of Moses had been highly serviceable to him on so many occasions, an opportunity, by no means agreeable, now presented itself for the exercise of it. Miriam and Aaron took offence at him, and let him perceive it by their ill-natured speeches. What cause of offence had he given them? He gave them none, but they took offence at his having married an Ethiopian woman. Nor was this the real cause of their vexation, but offended self-love and mortified ambition. "Has the Lord indeed only spoken by Moses?" asked they, "Hath he not also spoken by *us*?" "We are older than he; we have the Spirit of God as well as he; and yet every thing must be done as he prescribes; we are weary of it; we will also share in the authority he exercises, and not be content with all that he pre-

scribes." Thus speaks ambition and self-love. The privileges of others are regarded by these evil qualities as insults. They are not content that others should possess them, but they wish themselves to enjoy them, and carefully collect together what they can to depreciate them in the opinion of others. And here we see this corrupt principle manifesting itself in venerable and even holy individuals. How lamentable ! Ought not the relation in which we stand to each other to be similar to that of the members of the same body, as the Apostle directs (1 Cor. xii. 12, &c.) For the advantages Christ bestows upon others, he is able also to bestow upon thee. If thou art low, rejoice in thy exaltation, if thou art weak, rejoice in thy strength, art thou strong, rejoice in thy weakness.

The Ethiopians were a people held in great contempt by the Jews, and still are so, according to the curse pronounced upon their progenitor Ham, or Canaan by Noah, that he should be "a servant of servants." This contempt rebounded upon Moses, for having taken a wife out of this accursed race. Moses was also slow of speech. Great gifts of grace have generally also a great counterpoise, in order that the individual may not exalt himself, but continue humble ; as well as that others may not idolize him, which is so easily the case. Miriam, a prophetess, a poetess, and a singer, imagined herself far above her sister-in-law, and not only despised her, but her brother on her account, and refused to be inferior to him. But what reason had she to exalt herself ? She was no Ethiopian ; but had she herself and her own measures to thank for that ? and though the other was an Ethiopian, yet was she the wife of Moses. Before God there is no difference, but all

men are alike in this, that they are sinners, and come short of the glory of God. It is not the colour of the skin, but of the heart; not the stock from which we come, but sin which renders us contemptible; and he that despises another on account of his sins, may see to it, *how* he does so, lest a pharisaic spirit intermingle itself. God forgives great sinners when they repent, and condemns righteous persons, when they think they need no repentance. Nay, does not God put the children of Israel on a level with the Ethiopians, when he says, "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O children of Israel?" (Amos ix. 7.) Therefore do not think so highly of thyself, O Miriam! but look at thy own appearance, whether thou art not also black. Happy for thee, if with Solomon's Ethiopian bride, thou canst say, "I am black but comely."

Moses is also to be considered as a type of Christ, even in this marriage, which was so much disapproved of by Miriam and Aaron. The church of the elect is called the bride of Christ. He is her husband. But was this church by nature any thing else but an Ethiopian—hateful and deformed? And did not Jesus really act as a suitor to this Ethiopian; since he not only declared that he was come to seek and to save that which was lost, to call sinners to repentance, and not the righteous; but also acted in such a manner, that it was said of him, "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." And when at length the heathen had the gospel preached to them, the irritation of the Jews rose to its height, and especially that of the priesthood. And speaking generally, that which renders the christian religion so odious to some, is that it is a religion for poor sinners.

Miriam and Aaron refuse to be scholars and to hang upon the lips of Moses on all occasions; they have understanding themselves, and can give advice, they are not people that require to be led and guided, but who already know how to rule. And wherever these sentiments prevail, religion causes offence. But the poorer and more miserable any one becomes, the more is he reconciled to it. The gospel must be just what it is, and nothing else, in order to suit him. O how the soul is gratified that Jesus receives sinners! This it is which comforts the man, and makes him so fond of Jesus.

But the Lord knows how to bring down the soul which he loves; even as he said to those who thought themselves rich; "Whom I love, I rebuke and chasten." Thus it fared with Miriam and Aaron. The Lord heard what they said. "The Lord heard it"—important expression! Job might have cause to boast of his righteousness before men; but as soon as he speaks with God, he says, "Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee?" Ah, "God seeth not as man seeth." David is justly terrified at the idea of God imputing iniquity, and says in such a case, "who could stand!" But Miriam and Aaron did not imagine they had said any thing improper, and thought they were much in the right. But how soon were their views altered, and how deeply were both of them ashamed and humbled!

They were all three in the tabernacle. The Lord suddenly ordered them all to leave it. But why Moses? doubtless to humble him also, that the great praise which the Lord bestowed upon him might not puff him up; for the Lord called him his servant, who was faithful in all his house, with whom he spake mouth to

mouth, and not in parables and enigmatical expressions, but who saw him in his real form, and said, "Wherefore were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses? And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them, and he departed, and the cloud also departed from off the tabernacle." Thus the Lord turned his back upon them, and rejected them with disdain. Their eyes now opened. The supposed justice of their cause was turned into injustice, they became in their own eyes black as the Ethiopian, and now gladly left their sister-in-law in peace. Thus God seeth not as man seeth, and let every one beware of thinking slightly of any kind of sin, but regard it as it really is, the greatest of evils. We must become humble, and possess a broken heart, that trembleth at his word, for unto such does the Lord look. Miriam and Aaron had experienced the divine favour; the Lord therefore regards their improper conduct in a severer light; and you, who call upon God as your father, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear, for there is no respect of persons with him. But what must it be, when the Lord turns away from a soul in anger, even with a gracious intention! Hezekiah experienced it, and said, "I shall go softly all my years in the bitterness of my soul." (Isaiah xxxviii. 15.)

Nor was this all; but Miriam became leprous as snow, and thus great contrition was produced in each. Their high thoughts and lofty imaginations were now at once brought low. Miriam, the cause of the whole, is so astonished, that she cannot utter a word; but Aaron makes a very humble confession of sin. "Alas, my lord," thus reverentially does he address the Ethiopian's husband, "I beseech thee lay not the sin upon

us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned. She is like a dead carcase!" Nor does Aaron think himself a whit better than his sister. He now calls the conduct of both, sin and folly, and his greatest concern is, that the sin may not lie upon them; on which account he beseeches Moses, whom just before he had despised, this mediator of the old covenant, to intercede for them with God. Does not grace act thus with every soul which it humbles? O how precious to such is the Mediator of the new covenant, and how indispensable is he, who previously seemed so superfluous, as long as the individual was pleased with himself, and had only fault to find with others, whilst blind to his own wretchedness! If others are Ethiopians, he then thinks himself as leprous as a dead carcase. If he formerly exalted himself above many, he now humbles himself under every one, and only entreats mercy and compassion.

Scarcely was it requisite that Aaron should call upon his brother to intercede for their sister. It pained Moses himself deeply; the offensive language of his sister had not deeply grieved him, nor the praise the Lord bestowed upon him rendered him proud. He still remembers well how a short time before he had been himself so unbelieving, and felt more compassion than vexation. Hence he prayed with great fervour, saying, "Heal her now, O God! I beseech thee!" Happy are we, that we have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was also compassed about with infirmities, that he might have compassion on the weak, the tempted, and the erring. On which account we now come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in every time of need.

And thus ought Christians to have pity on each other, and bear each other's burdens, but not act as lords and judges over God's heritage; being themselves also in the flesh. The more humble, modest, and mean we are in our own eyes, the better and safer for us.

But Miriam was to be thoroughly humbled. The intercession of Moses was therefore heard, but not on the spot. She was to learn to consider herself as one whose father, from just displeasure, had spit in her face, and to bear the shame of it. Moses was therefore commanded to exclude her seven days from the camp, after which she was restored. O what a week of repentance, prayer, pain, and grief must it have been! Will she not frequently have cast herself upon the ground, and become almost intolerable to herself because of her sin and folly? This remedy had, however, such a good effect, that we read of no further fault which she committed. We must be thoroughly humbled, and then we shall be thoroughly healed. This period of humiliation lasted with the children of Israel full forty years, that every thing might be made manifest which was in their hearts.

The people sympathized cordially and sincerely in the humiliation and correction of this distinguished individual, and did not take their departure until after she was received into the camp. They then removed into the wilderness of Paran. This was a very large, mountainous, and dreadful desert; its name signifies beauty, ornament, splendid attire. Singular that a desert should be thus termed! But are not many things called good which are not so? And is there not much of that which is good that does not seem to be so? The gospel appears to the natural man to be a dry and barren desert, which

contains in it nothing attractive, but much that is repulsive. One thinks he finds in it inexplicable contradictions; another absurdity and folly; but how is the scene changed, when on the path of the knowledge of himself and his sinfulness, he attains to a proper view of it! But let every one see to it, that he does not make choice of the wilderness instead of Canaan, the shadow instead of the substance! rather lay hold on eternal life, to which ye are called. Renounce every thing for Christ's sake, and know, that in following him, you will receive it back a hundred-fold with persecutions, and eventually without them.

Let me, in conclusion, only observe that the place where they encamped in this enormous wilderness was called Rithmah, which signifies juniper, of which, probably, great quantities grew there, which, if useful in repelling the snakes which infested the neighbouring parts, were still troublesome enough by their thorny nature. Canaan is now very near, we are close upon the borders, at most but half a league from them. There is no obstruction to their entering into the country—neither rivers nor lofty mountains. Reasonably do we exult on the occasion. Jerusalem, Hebron, and all the rest of the cities are no longer afar off. Methinks we already hear the busy hum of their streets, and see the flocks and vineyards upon the hills, hear the song of the vine-dressers and the lowing of the herds, whilst our hearts leap for joy.

But here we will break off, in order, in the sequel, to hear what further occurred. O Lord save thy people, and bless thine inheritance! Amen.

XXVI.

THE SPIES SENT FORTH.

NUMB. xiii. 1—3.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

“Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel; of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them.

“And Moses, by the commandment of the Lord, sent them from the wilderness of Paran; all those men were heads of the children of Israel.”

THE Israelites are still at Rithmah, on the borders of Canaan, in that part which was afterwards allotted to Judah for his inheritance. Let us now more closely consider the events that occurred there, which are of great importance, and to which the Holy Scriptures frequently refer, and hold them up as a warning example to every future age.

It was then thought proper to send forth twelve spies, according to the number of the tribes of Israel, who were enjoined to search out the land, and then give an exact account of its nature, soil, fruitfulness, the state of its towns and villages and their inhabitants, as well as to bring specimens of the fruits of the

country. According to Deut. i. 22, this idea proceeded from the people themselves, but according to Numb. xiii. 1, 2, the Lord commanded it to be done. In the thing itself, therefore, both were unanimous. The plan was very rational, and duly considered. Even as there are people, who expect to accomplish every thing by means of reason and reflection—so there are others, who are immediately ready with their censures, when mention is made of employing reason. Both are equally blameable. Why should not every thing be maturely considered, and wherefore may not this be done in a devout and acceptable manner? It was very rational and advisable, that Moses urgently besought Hobab his brother-in-law, although he was an Ethiopian, to travel with them through the desert, with which he was well acquainted, although the pillar of cloud sufficiently pointed out the way. And in like manner, it was acting very wisely to send spies into the land.

It has cost me a little effort to refrain from giving the meaning of the names of the twelve spies, after having given that of the names of the twelve captains of the host. However, I relinquished this the more willingly, since although their names had mostly pleasing significations, yet those who bore them were bad people, as, besides this, they filled high offices, they were so much the more dangerous, the greater was the confidence which was placed in them. Nor must we be concerned, because there are and have been names of eminence amongst the enemies of the truth, and that on the whole, the higher ranks are at the same time the most dissolute. This is certainly a heavy judgment. When professors, teachers, and preachers are opposed

to the truth, things look desperate ; but this, alas ! is nothing uncommon. Two names, however, I must mention, because they make an honourable exception, and are the only ones of all the six hundred thousand which came out of Egypt, who reached Canaan. One of them was called Caleb, or “good heart” and certainly nothing that is evil and only the good heart enters Canaan. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” He was the son of Jephunneh that is “turn away.” He did not agree with, but turned away from the sentiments of the rest, however great was the majority against him, even though they gained the general approbation, held important offices, and had honourable appellations. Caleb’s sentiments were at variance with them, as well as his conduct. The second was called Oshea ; but Moses gave him the name of Joshua, or more properly Jehoschua. Both names signify the same, implying a saviour. But in the second name, Jehoschua, as is evident from the sound, a part of the name of Jehovah is interwoven, so that it may be rendered Jehovah the Saviour, which is nothing else than the name of Jesus. This is extremely remarkable. It was Joshua, and not Moses, who brought the children of Israel into the land of Canaan. The law was unable to do it, but Jesus accomplished it. Nor do any enter heaven except Joshua and Caleb—Jesus and a good heart.

The spies therefore departed. Their undertaking was no trifling matter. They were obliged to depend entirely upon the divine protection ; for had they been discovered, the Canaanites would not have spared them. But he who undertakes any thing by divine commission, may consider himself safe under divine

protection ; which these men also experienced, and it is almost to be regretted that we know not the particulars of what occurred to them, since doubtless much of a remarkable nature occurred, and divine providence must have frequently interposed in a very visible manner on their behalf. So little haste did they make in their researches, that they remained absent forty days, during which time, much might have been ascertained.

It may be supposed with what eager expectation, and occasionally with what anxiety their return to the Israelitish camp was looked for, how often they must have been the subject of conversation to the mass of the people, and of the intercession of the pious. At length they returned. How great must have been the joy, how inquisitive the curiosity, how numerous the questions ! They saw first the glorious proof of the excellence of the country upon their shoulders, which must have been a highly pleasing sight in such a barren wilderness. In the valley of Eschcol, they had cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes, called Eschcol in Hebrew, and which name they gave to the valley, and bore it between two of them upon a staff. Although we cannot exactly infer its weight and size from the manner in which it was carried, since it was only a proof of their prudence to carry it thus for a considerable distance that it might sustain no injury ; yet it is certain that in Asia the grapes grow to a size which might seem incredible to us. In many places the clusters are so large, that a boy of twelve years old can hide himself behind one of them, and the single berries are as large as our apples. Two men might therefore have enough to do to carry such a

cluster for any length of time. What a sight must this have been for the children of Israel, now on the point of entering such a country!

Besides these grapes, they also brought pomegranates and figs of singular size and beauty. The pomegranate is a fruit as pleasant and refreshing, as it is salutary and beautiful; its rind is adorned with the most pleasing stripes and colours, and when ripe, it makes a rent, through which purple-coloured juicy kernals and berries look forth invitingly, which are easily pressed out of the aperture.

These excellent fruits, however, were not presented to them so much for their participation as for public inspection, in order the more to animate their longing after such a glorious country. They were first fruits, of which the harvest was to follow, and were presented to them as a pledge.

Something similar also occurs in the spiritual life. We have likewise the first fruits of the Spirit. Precious fruits from the heavenly Canaan are sometimes exhibited to our view, and we are refreshed with the powers of the world to come, although, in general, we are obliged to be contented with the daily manna of grace. The devil showed Christ, in a delusive manner, all the kingdoms of this world in a moment, and said, "All this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Christ acts in a similar way with his people, by affording them a prospect of the glory of his kingdom, and giving them a foretaste of it, saying unto them, "All this and yet more will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me:" to whom the ravished soul replies, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee; and

though flesh and heart should fail, yet thou art ever the joy of my heart and my portion !” And thus the covenant is sealed between them.

With this matter-of-fact account, the spies combined their vocal testimony, against the truth of which nothing could be objected. They said, “ the land is good ; and surely it floweth with milk and honey ; and this is the fruit of it, by which you may judge of it yourselves.” They added further, “ Nevertheless the people are strong, there are giants among them, and the cities are walled and very great.” This dismayed the people ; therefore Caleb addressed them and said, “ Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.”

Such was the appearance of Canaan, and such is also the case with real religion. He that will live long and see good days, let him become a Christian. Unspeakably great, incomparable, and eternal, are the benefits connected with it ; whilst without, all is misery, corruption, and ruin. But it is no easy matter to enter the kingdom of God. A great and strong people, amongst whom there are giants, are opposed to thee ; there are various nations also, and after having overcome one, another will oppose thee. But let us, notwithstanding, boldly go up and possess the land, for we are well able.

But it was with reference to this last point, that the opinions were divided. The ten other spies described the astonishing difficulties more at large, and brought up an evil report of the land. They described the inhabitants as a very warlike people, who fed upon each other—cannibals therefore, who cut the matter short with a person. But how was it that they escaped

out of the country? This was either a visible proof of the divine protection, or the people could not be such men-eaters as they described them. They all appeared to them very great, and we were, said they, compared with them, but as grasshoppers. Although this description might have been somewhat exaggerated, yet it was true upon the whole. Moses confirmed it himself, and quoted the proverb, "Who can stand against the sons of Enak!" Enak must have been a giant as well as his sons and descendants, who were called Nephilim; that is, the fallen, as also monsters, of whom mention is likewise made before the flood. Ought not this to remind us of the fall of angels and of men, by which they are become real monsters? Be that as it may, we have every reason to believe that the taking possession of the true Canaan, of which the former was only a type, the pressing into the kingdom of God, is attended with the greatest difficulties, which are by no means easily cleared away, either in the whole or in part. Nor ought we to think it superfluous, to bring these difficulties from time to time before us, in order that we may be thereby induced to take the most appropriate measures to obviate them. Besides the law and the curse, of which we have already had occasion to speak, the sin which has so thoroughly pervaded our natures, and rendered us as incompetent to any thing good, as inclined to all that is evil, continually opposes itself to prevent our fully possessing the "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," to which we are called. Every one will readily grant that sin must not reign in us; but what is to cast it down from its throne in us, since we are, lamentably enough, not two, but one with it? The strong man

armed keepeth his goods in peace; and it is only a stronger than he, who, after many a struggle, at length expels him, and obtains possession of the same, which even then is not safe from his attacks, seeing he frequently returns with other spirits more wicked than himself; which renders it necessary to maintain a continual warfare.

A very important dispute now arose between Joshua and Caleb on the one side, and the ten spies on the other, in the presence of the whole people. The former affirmed, that the people were well able to go up and possess the land—the latter, that it was impossible. The first two by no means denied what was said by the rest, of the giants and the strong cities; for they were not inclined to deceive the people in any respect, by giving them false conceptions of the difficulties to be encountered. But they wished to show them the real state of the case, and in what manner that which seemed impracticable might be accomplished, and that which was improbable rendered real. But the worthy men found it a difficult undertaking. They could not demonstrate and prove their view of the matter upon rational grounds, but were obliged to have recourse to faith. They found, however, no credence, since the people were destitute of that faith which takes invisible things into account, and were guided solely by reason, which does not go beyond that which is visible and natural.

No wonder, therefore, that no one sided with them, but all with their opponents. The whole congregation lifted up their voice and wept, and this lasted the whole night through. Their distress then rose to its height,

on the very borders of Canaan, and they never thought themselves so far from it as now, when they were so near it. The case was similar here, though much more painful, to what they had experienced at Marah, where, though they found water to quench their thirst, yet, when about to drink of it, they found it intolerably bitter. Canaan now lay immediately before them, but there seemed no possibility of arriving at it. How lamentable! No star broke through the thick darkness of the night. It fared with them as with all the wicked who dream only of enjoyment, until the horrors of perdition overtake them, towards which they are carelessly and securely marching. At day break, the darkness which enveloped them manifested itself in a more obvious manner. They murmured against Moses and the Lord himself. They wished for death, and complained that the Lord was leading them into a land where they would fall by the sword, and their wives and children become a prey. They therefore decided upon choosing a captain, who might conduct them back into Egypt.

Only four individuals opposed themselves to the storm.—Moses and Aaron cast themselves in silence upon their faces before all the assembly of the congregation, thereby manifesting their profound grief, as well as for the purpose of praying to God. At length Moses spoke, and preached to them the necessity of exercising faith. “Be not dismayed,” said he, “neither be ye afraid of them. The Lord our God will go before you and will fight for you. The Lord will bear ye up, as a man beareth his son.” But his exhortation to trust in the living God was in vain, and rebounded back from the rock of their unbelief.

Joshua and Caleb were also deeply concerned, and rent their clothes from excess of grief. They also exhorted the people to believe, by which they would assuredly triumph over every difficulty; and in order the better to attain their laudable object, they employed the most powerful mode of expression. "They shall be as bread to us; the Lord is departed from them." For when the hour of extremity arrives, when the soul is obliged to pass through deep waters, and the billows go over her head—it is time to unfold the most powerful incitements which the gospel offers to faith. And for this purpose the word of God affords the richest materials.

But, in the present instance, all was in vain. The encouraging address of the two men produced an entirely opposite effect. The people's unbelief broke out into enmity and wrath, and they called out on all sides, that they should be stoned. O the horrible depravity of the human heart! But truth has always met with similar treatment. Where it is not received, the individual takes up arms against it, and rejects it with bitterness. When truth appeared on earth in person, it found no lodging, and because it still did not depart, they nailed it to a cross. When they were unable to expel it, they banished its messengers, and tormented its confessors with every species of torture. Thus was it received in the camp of the Israelites, and thus is it still received. The number of its adversaries is considerable. "They speak loftily," says Asaph, "they set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth." The multitude side with them. "But we are not of them that draw back, but

of them that believe and are saved." If we abide in him, and his words abide in us, we shall know the truth, and the truth shall make us free. All that are born of God overcome the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. May the Lord powerfully produce this faith in us ! Amen.

XXVII.

THE ANGER OF THE LORD AT THE PEOPLE'S UNBELIEF.

NUMB. xiv. 10—39.

“And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.

“And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shown amongst them?

“I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them? and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.

“And Moses said unto the Lord, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them);

“And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land; for they have heard that thou, Lord, art among this people; that thou, Lord, art seen face to face; and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them by day time in a pillar of cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night.

“Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee, will speak, saying,

“Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

“And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,

“The Lord is long suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.

"Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people, according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people from Egypt even until now.

"And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to thy word; but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.

"Because all those men, which have seen my glory and my miracles which I did in Egypt, and in the wilderness, have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;

"Surely they shall not see the land, which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me, see it;

"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully; him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

"(Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) To-morrow turn you, and get you in the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.

"And the Lord spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,

"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.

"Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:

"Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upwards, which have murmured against me.

"Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun.

"But your little ones, which you said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

"But as for you, your carcases, they shall fall in this wilderness.

"And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcases be wasted in the wilderness.

"After the number of the days in which ye searched the land,

even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years; and ye shall know the altering of my purpose.

“I the Lord have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me; in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die.

“And the men which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land,

“Even those men, that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

“But Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still.

“And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel; and the people mourned greatly.”

WE lately witnessed rebellion rising to its height in the camp of the Israelites—the two worthy men Joshua and Caleb, in danger of being stoned—and the people on the point of choosing a captain to lead them back to Egypt. The Lord now intervenes. His glory appears. He desires the consent of Moses to destroy the people. Moses supplicates forgiveness for them. The Lord grants his petition, but swears at the same time, that none of all those who had come up out of Egypt should enter the land of Canaan. They should all die in the wilderness, and their children only should arrive there. Instead of marching into the promised land which lay immediately before them, they were compelled to return to the Red Sea. Forty years were they to wander in the wilderness, consequently still about thirty-eight years. The ten spies soon perished; the remaining six hundred thousand were destined gradually to follow

them, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb. This was the immutable decision. The Lord swore it, and it stood fast.

But what was the peculiar cause of the Lord's hot displeasure, which induced him to swear an immutable oath, that they should not enter the promised land? Were the difficulties too great, the Canaanites too strong, the cities too firm? No. Had they committed such an offence with their golden calf, that the Lord even now remembered it against them? Nor was this the cause; for that offence had been forgiven. Was it their frequent murmurings, or other sins, that now received their punishment, or what was the cause of such severe measures being adopted respecting them? The Apostle points out the reason, when he says, in Heb. iii. 17, &c., "But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness, and to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear," adds he, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us is the gospel preached as well as unto them; but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we, who believe, do enter into rest." Which was it therefore of all the sins they had committed, which excluded them from Canaan, and excludes every one from the bliss of heaven? None that is committed against any one of the ten commands; for from this there is a deliverance; but that which is committed against the gospel, which

proclaims and offers this deliverance to us, out of which there is none to be found. And by what do men sin against the gospel? By unbelief.

I wish to treat of this unbelief in a scriptural manner, to show in what it consists, and how it manifests itself, both where it reigns and where it makes occasional attacks. May the Lord afford the necessary aid! We are all extremely interested in this subject, because it is unbelief that damns, even as it is faith that saves. Hast thou faith, thou shalt be saved; but if unbelief reigns in thee, thou wilt assuredly perish.

Let me first make a few remarks respecting faith. It is of supreme importance, because the whole of salvation is connected with it. The justification, in virtue of which the sinner is absolved at the divine tribunal, depends solely upon faith. Were I to quote every passage of Scripture to prove this position, I should occupy the half of this discourse. Let Gal. ii. 16, suffice: "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."

Purification of heart is also produced by faith, even as Peter says, (Acts xv. 9,) "God purified their hearts by faith," and Christ himself says plainly, (chap. xxvi. 18,) "They are sanctified by faith, that is in me."

Peter ascribes preservation also to faith, when he says, "Being kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation."

John ascribes to it the entire conquest over the world, when he declares that "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

But we have no need to enter further into detail; since Christ himself, when leaving this world and

ascending to heaven, comprehends every thing in the brief expression, "He that believeth shall be saved."

Let us now listen to some of the sentiments of Scripture on unbelief. Like faith it is the only thing at which Christ wondered. "He that believeth not is condemned already," says Christ; and John the Baptist adds, "The wrath of God abideth on him." "The devil works in the children of disobedience, and blindeth the minds of them that believe not," says Paul. John declares, that "whosoever believeth not, maketh God a liar," and thus commits the most heinous sin. He departs from the living God, is not justified, nor sanctified, nor preserved; and can do nothing but sin. Thus all is comprehended in the words of Christ, when he declares, "He that believeth not shall be damned."

Thus it is evident, that salvation and damnation are connected with nothing but faith and unbelief, and this concerns us all in the highest degree; for we are individually either believers or unbelievers; unless we make a third class, consisting of such as are under the preparation of grace, and stand in the posture of the man who exclaimed, "Lord, I believe! help thou my unbelief!" But by nature we are all sick of the disease of unbelief; for "God hath concluded all in unbelief." (Rom. xi. 32.) Faith is our supreme duty; unbelief our most heinous crime.

Let us then ascertain more minutely the nature and properties of unbelief. What is it? How does it manifest itself? It is the opposite of faith. If faith consists in a readiness to receive Christ solely and wholly as the only and perfect source of life and righteousness, unbelief consists in the non-existence and absence of this readiness. If faith regards as

true what God has revealed in his word, unbelief regards it as false. If faith is a heartfelt confidence, unbelief is mistrust. But as the Christian finds within him in this life, an old and new man; so faith and unbelief reside within him, and sometimes one and sometimes the other, has the upper-hand. Let us therefore consider unbelief, both in its dominion and its occasional attacks.

It shows itself in its complete supremacy in those who deny even the existence of God, and the immortality of the soul; who do not revere the Word of God as a divine revelation, but entirely depart from it in sentiment, nay, even cherish and defend opinions inimical to it, and assail, contest, and even mock and ridicule the doctrines it contains, whilst persecuting those that believe them. There are multitudes of such characters at present in the christian world, and this theoretic infidelity has extended itself even to the very lowest class of the people, after having commenced with the higher and more polished ranks in life. Of such individuals there is never any want. David spoke of old, of the fools that say in their heart, "there is no God." Formerly they said it only in their heart; but now they openly maintain it. True it is, especially in the present day, that not many wise or noble are chosen, and that the time is come, when men will no longer hear sound doctrine; and it is no rare occurrence for whole congregations to oppose the choice of a truly pious preacher or parochial schoolmaster, and refuse to have such a one. Many efforts are made and artifices used to bring up an evil report of the land of Canaan; and for two that speak in favour of it there are ten that gainsay them. God however, in his

mercy, has of later years raised up many, and enlightened them with the light of truth; so that the gospel is again abundantly preached. Unbelief, therefore, in its complete manifestation, denies God the Father and his creation, God the Son and the redemption wrought out by him, and God the Holy Ghost and his sanctifying influences, the divine attributes, the divine promises, as well as the word in which they are recorded, the fall of Adam, and consequently also the necessity of repentance, regeneration, justification, and sanctification, and even of future blessedness and perdition. They are true children of the devil, the father of lies, and are consequently full of lies.

But it does not develope itself in this manner in those who receive truth as such for their basis, are perhaps zealous for it, and possess a circumstantial knowledge of it; or else know as little of the truth as of error which is opposed to it; but on whose heart and conscience the truth makes no suitable and abiding impression; they have no love to it, and even rather avoid it. The consideration of the righteousness and holiness of God neither rouses nor alarms them; nor does the contemplation of his mercy and his grace affect and humble them; they do not feel moved and impelled to renounce sin, and desire the divine favour as their greatest treasure. They continue in an unsusceptible and morbid state. They may indeed be occasionally terrified and roused, like Felix at the preaching of Paul; but the most of them come very rarely to hear the word, although "faith cometh by hearing;" or even if they are present, they do not listen, understand, or take it to heart. The number of these practical infidels is, alas! very great, and the word does

not profit them, because they do not mix faith with it.

Unbelief very prominently manifests itself in refusing to come to Christ; for the non-reception of Christ is the essence and substance of unbelief. It desires neither him nor his grace. It does not hunger and thirst after righteousness. It does not have recourse to him, much less does it trust in him and expect salvation solely and wholly from him. From what, therefore, ought every one to seek to be delivered? From this very sin. He that is free from it, finds, in every other respect, a beaten path; but he in whom it rules, or in the degree in which it exists in any one, finds his soul closed against God and all the influences of his light, and open to Satan, securing the dominion of sin, and bringing with it nothing but torment.

But from whence does unbelief proceed? Alas! we bring it into the world with us, and thus all are unbelievers, and become believers only through regeneration. This is a part of our unhappy inheritance left us by the first Adam. He suffered himself to be seduced into unbelief, and thus we have all inherited it from him. Hence no one is at liberty to deem himself free from unbelief, unless delivered from it by regeneration.

But regeneration does not free us from it, so entirely as to exonerate us from all further attacks from it. It is then, first, that the individual sees and feels its power, and how deeply it is rooted in him. Hence he is obliged to enter upon the fight of faith, and to make it his chief concern to become strong and complete in faith.

The children of Israel present us, in this part of their history, with a warning example, respecting which the

Apostle says, "Let us beware that we do not fall after the same example of unbelief." But Joshua and Caleb furnished a better example, whose faith we ought to follow. The Israelites did not believe they should be able to enter into the land of Canaan, although God had promised it them, and engaged to conduct them thither. The preaching of faith made no impression upon their minds, but much more the discourse of unbelief. The inhabitants of Canaan seemed to them to be much too powerful, and entirely invincible, and they made no account of God, his power, faithfulness, and promises. They had no confidence in him, save merely what was visible, and then they easily comprehended what the ten said to them, because it harmonised with their natural mode of thinking; whilst the statements of Joshua and Caleb were repulsive to them and groundless. The conduct of these two men manifested great faith. They by no means denied the difficulties of the undertaking, and that their own strength was insufficient for the work. But faith calculates quite differently to unbelief. The latter stops short at what it sees; but faith takes God into account, his promises, power, faithfulness, and grace, and thus possesses a courage, founded on that which is invisible. With God it expects to do exploits. Their ability to this they sought not in themselves, but in God. And thus the believer acts in every case. If asked whether he can overcome the wicked one, however terrible and powerful he may be? Faith answers, "I am able." Canst thou stand in the judgment, seeing that thy sins exceed the sand on the sea shore; and since thou art still continually inclined to all that is evil, canst thou, in spite of every temptation and danger, persevere to

the end and come off more than conqueror? Canst thou crucify and slay thy corrupt nature, lay aside the sin that most easily besets thee, and thus perfect holiness in the fear of God? Faith will answer, "I am well able, since in the Lord I have righteousness and strength;" for faith places its confidence entirely in him and not in itself, and hopes to the end for the grace which shall be revealed at the manifestation of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Unbelief acts very differently, and regards such a line of conduct as absurd, foolish, and fanatical. It either despairs in the hour of distress, because it has no hold nor support from the invisible world; or else it hopes in visible aid, trusts in man, and makes flesh its arm. Its own wisdom is to help it through, and if the brittle ice breaks under its feet, nothing is left but terror, helplessness, and despondency, unless God graciously suffers every thing thus to fall from the individual's hands, in order by this means to teach him, to found the edifice of his hopes on the true foundation. His works and supposed righteousness have hitherto been the ground of his consolation. He is himself his god, as far as it goes. The children of Israel did not place confidence in God that he could bring them to Canaan, and yet they trusted in themselves to be able, without him, to find their way back to Egypt through the wilderness. What absurdity, what presumption!

Unbelief, the want of confidence in God, was therefore the only reason why they did not enter the land, but were obliged to return from its borders to the Red Sea, as if they were really going back again to Egypt. Unbelief was the cause, why God was thus angry with

them, and why he would have destroyed them all at once, had not Moses interceded for them. It was the cause why they obtained only, after the lapse of forty years, that which they might have possessed at the time. O destructive unbelief!

The Apostle, in Hebrews iv. places us on the same footing with the Israelites, when he says "It is preached unto us, as well as unto them." What is thus preached? The promise of entering into his rest. The gospel of Christ, the glad tidings of the grace of God are preached to us. We are continually told, that "it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." We are informed that no sins are too heinous to be forgiven; no wretchedness so profound, from which Jesus Christ cannot deliver us; that no one is so bad, as to be unable to attain it, and none so good as not to need it. It is therefore said also to us, "Take heed, lest any of you fall after the same example of unbelief," but believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, justified, purified, strengthened, and beatified. We do not, however, intend by this a mere outward confession of belief; but a living self and world-denying heartfelt faith. The first step to which is the consciousness of that unbelief, in which we are all so deeply plunged, shut up, and buried by nature. O how unable you will feel yourselves to believe, when you seriously desire true faith; how many hindrances will you meet with, and how often will you be compelled to exclaim, "Lord, help my unbelief." Strengthen my faith! What a fight of faith you will then probably have to endure! But fight for it nevertheless. Struggle for it, until, with the man

born blind, you can fall down, worship, and say, "I believe!" O how happy will you then be "for we, who believe, do enter into rest." "He that believeth hath eternal life, but he that believeth not, shall not see life; for without faith, it is impossible to please God." Believe, therefore that you may be justified and become heirs of eternal life. Amen.

XXVIII.

THE SABBATH BREAKER,

AND

THE REBELLION OF KORAH.

NUMB. xv. 36.

“And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”

NUMB. xvi. 32, 33

“And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods.

“They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished from among the congregation.”

THE children of Israel are still at Rithmah on the borders of Canaan, where the unhappy events recorded in our text took place.. We regard in them a two-fold subject of consideration. The inviolability first of the law, and secondly of the priesthood.

The severity and inviolable nature of the law, appears from the history of the Sabbath breaker. The case was as follows. A man went about in the camp, one Sabbath day, and gathered up some wood. This was the crime. But although he might not be justified in doing so, yet many things doubtless might have been said in his excuse, by which his crime might have been palliated. He was permitted to gather wood, but he did so on the Sabbath. He doubtless knew, that God had forbidden every species of labour on that day, at least he might and ought to have known it. But he was ignorant that all labour was so strictly prohibited, even upon pain of death. And can gathering a few sticks be called labour? The man probably did not do it with the intention of showing that he disregarded the divine command, nor to offend others, and tempt them to evil.

But see, what an astonishing movement this apparent trifle caused in the whole camp! The people who found the man thus occupied, bring him to Moses, who calls together all the elders of the congregation on account of it, and requests their decision upon it. The thing appears of importance to them, but considering all the circumstances mentioned above, too difficult for them to pronounce a decision. They do not wish to be hasty, and therefore put the man in ward; for it was not clearly expressed in the law what should be done to him.

The Lord then took up the matter himself. And what decision did he give respecting him? Did he order him to be set at liberty with a warning to do so no more, since he had erred more from ignorance than impiety, and the gathering of a few sticks could

scarcely be called labour? Or did the Lord command him to be kept prisoner for a few days, that he might not regard himself as innocent, although he knew not how great a sin he had committed? This, according to our views, would have been mild and merciful, if not even just. But our judgment in divine things amounts to nothing. The law knows nothing of mercy and lenity, and still less of a right to regard things less strictly. Certainly, were the morality of the present day to sit in judgment, it would declare nothing to be culpable sin, or as meriting eternal death. Suppose the question were to concern the keeping of the Lord's day; how is it celebrated, even though the ancient strictness should by no means be applied to it, nor evangelical liberty infringed upon? By what is it distinguished from other days? Are not many customary occupations carried on, on that day, and especially in the former part of it? How much of it is also spent in idleness? People sleep longer than usual, dress better, receive and pay visits, and spend the evening in a variety of amusements and dissipation, so that even midnight resounds with the rattling of carriages, and the wild uproar. England is the only country on earth where the case is different. Profound silence and tranquillity reigns on the Sunday in London—that immense city, which resembles an entire kingdom. Why should not this be the case elsewhere, especially in our little valley? The reason is, because “ye will not.” You will live according to your lusts, and many are fearful of diminishing their gains, if they were to keep the day, although the Lord says, it shall not be in vain, even if we only shut a door in his temple in honour of his commands.

But what was the sentence pronounced upon the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath day? The Lord said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him," and this sentence was really executed. We see, in this single instance, the dreadful severity and strictness of the divine law; for the same is extended to the whole of the commandments. If men think so little of transgressing them, yet God is only the more strict. He that faileth in one point is guilty of all. Reflect upon the import of these words, and what would become of us, were this rule to be acted upon in our case! Who amongst us can say, he has only transgressed in one point? And were any one to confess that, he would, according to this rule, necessarily perish. How much more he, who has repeatedly and grossly transgressed! We must give an account of every idle word; and what an account will that be! Let our hearts and thoughts dwell upon the subject, and duly consider it; for it is the word and doctrine, not of man, but of God.

But why linger at such a terrifying consideration? In order that we may duly perceive our lost and sinful state; be thoroughly conscious of the impossibility of salvation out of Christ; comprehend the necessity of the obedience of Christ in our stead; obtain a contrite spirit and a broken heart; entirely despair of ourselves; take refuge with Jesus Christ, and thus be justified by faith in him, and become heirs of eternal life. The very reason why Christ is so indifferent to mankind, and that on that account they perish, is, because they are not aware of their lost state. The perception of it is half the deliverance from it. Rest not, therefore, until you can say with David, "Thou

forgavest the iniquity of my sin." "Bless the Lord, O my soul, who forgiveth all thine iniquities!"

The history of the rebellion of Korah confirms, in a terrific manner, the typical priesthood; against which he and his adherents opposed themselves, and as a punishment were swallowed up alive by the earth. The question concerning the offering of sacrifices and of incense, in a word, the priesthood. Moses, by divine command, had ordained his brother Aaron and his descendants to the high-priesthood, but the rest of the tribe of Levi and his own descendants to inferior priestly offices. Several were dissatisfied with this arrangement, and would not recognize it as divine; accused Moses of being imperious; asserted that others were equally fit for the priesthood; procured adherents, consisting solely of persons of rank and authority; rebelled, and refused to listen any longer to Moses, at whom they mocked and bitterly scoffed. "Is it a small thing," said they, "that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? Moreover, thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards." "Will you put out the eyes of these men?" How strange! They accuse Moses of a desire to rule, and yet practice it themselves! But the Lord interposed in a dreadful manner. The earth opened, and the whole of the conspirators with their families went down quick into the pit. A fire also went out from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty

men that offered incense; and because the people murmured, instead of humbling themselves, a plague went forth from the Lord, and slew fourteen thousand seven hundred of them.

On this, Aaron was solemnly established in the priesthood, and the Israelites rendered so tractable, that they were well satisfied with it. "Behold," said they to Moses, "we die, we perish, we all perish. Whosoever cometh any way near unto the tabernacle of the Lord, dieth. Shall we then be utterly consumed?" The Lord then said unto Aaron, "Thou, and thy sons, and thy father's house with thee, shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary and the charge of the altar, that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel." (Numb. xviii. 1, 5.) They were therefore compelled to be content with the typical priesthood, in order to continue in the divine favour, and did not consequently venture to encroach upon it.

We learn from this narrative a very important lesson. How much more ought we to be satisfied with the true priesthood of the Son of God, that thus we may be and continue acceptable in the sight of God; and how much more ought we to beware of entirely denying it, or even encroaching upon the office of that Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood, that he might offer unto us that righteousness which avails before God, in the forgiveness of sins, which had previously remained under the divine forbearance! Of which high-priesthood the Apostle speaks at large in Heb. vii.—x.

But what is implied in rejecting the priesthood of Christ, or encroaching upon it? Two things are to be noticed here, which we will briefly consider; the priesthood of Christ, and in what respect it may be rejected or encroached upon.

Jesus Christ is the true High Priest, and administers the true priesthood. He has, for the most part, perfected and finished it; by which we mean, he has redeemed us by the sacrifice of himself. He has reconciled us to God. He sanctified himself for those whom the Father had given him, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. As the Lamb of God, he has taken away the sins of the world. He was wounded by our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. He, the righteous one, suffered for the unrighteous, and bore our sins in his own body on the tree. He is the propitiation for our sins, and with one offering has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. By this offering, which he accomplished in the deepest humiliation on the cross, he became the cause of salvation to all them that obey him. The Son of God accomplished and finished this part of his priesthood during his thirty-three years' abode upon earth, particularly in the eighteen, six, and three last hours of his life—in Gethsemane, before his judges, and on the cross, during the three hours of darkness. On that day, reconciliation was made for iniquity, and everlasting righteousness brought in; when the Messiah was cut off, but not for himself. (Daniel ix. 24, 26.)

The Son of God administers also a principal part of his priestly office still; and this consists in his intercession, “for he ever liveth to make intercession for us.” Through this intercession, he accomplishes the

justification of his people, and what else is requisite for their salvation, even as he accomplished it for Peter, when he prayed that his faith might not fail?

It is in the exercise of this priestly office that our whole salvation lies, from its commencement to its termination. Hence this sacrifice needs not to be repeated, and therefore this typical service in the temple soon ceased after its completion, never to be re-established.

The punishment inflicted upon Korah and his adherents for attempting to obtain possession of the typical priesthood, may serve us also for a warning—not only against sin in the general, because of the dreadful and avenging righteousness and holiness of the divine being, but also against the rejection of the priesthood of the Son of God, and all encroachments upon it in particular.

How does a person become guilty of these? In two ways; the one gross, and the other more subtle. Even the names of the men who refused obedience to the typical priesthood ordained of God, contain intimations to this effect. For Abiram means the lofty self-exalting father, who is, however, only a worm; the character of the proud pharisee, who exalted himself above the humble publican. Dathan signifies a man of the law. Such was the rich young ruler who came to Jesus—not as a sick man to a physician, or as a poor man to one that is rich and benevolent. A third is called On; strength and sufficiency; “What lack I yet?” What shall I do? as if it were scarcely possible that any thing could be enjoined which he was unable to fulfil. And such are the sentiments from whence proceeds the rejection of the priesthood

of Christ, and of the atonement and reconciliation made by him.

Formerly, there was only a single sect—the Pelagians, and in latter times, the Socinians, who directly contested and denied the divinity of the Son of God, together with his priesthood, as well the corruption of human nature, the impossibility of being justified and saved by the law, and the necessity of the impartation of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, they boasted of the dignity and powers of human nature, took praise to themselves for duly explaining the duties of man, which, according to their doctrine, were sufficient, if people would only practise them; conceded Jesus the honour of a mere teacher and pattern, without acknowledging that more is required in order to salvation; and spoke very contemptuously of faith, so far as it did not mean mere fidelity and obedience; true Dathans, moralists; Ons, self-sufficient; and Abirams, arrogant worms. But now these errors have infected a great part of the protestant church. What value is attached, on the whole, to Christ, to his sacrifice and merits, or to the Holy Spirit? Man, say they, is a self-sufficient creature; he is whole, and needs no physician; he can easily repair and atone for his unimportant sins himself. This is the New Testamental conspiracy of Korah and his fellow rebels. However gifted and learned the heads and leaders of the party may be, we are commanded to abhor their perverted sentiments, and separate ourselves entirely from them. “For if we sin wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a dreadful looking for of judgment, and of fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

But as for you, ye humble and abased souls, who know how great your sin and misery is, do not reject the priesthood of Christ and his vicarious sacrifice. If you have no righteousness of your own to show, you do not require any. But lay hold only the more humbly and ardently on the bleeding merits of your Priest. If you are compelled to feel your utter unworthiness, and are disgusted with yourselves, cleave the more to Christ crucified, who offered himself unto God as a sweet-smelling savour, by whom ye are rendered acceptable. If from being self-sufficient pharisees, you have become wretched nothings, he is able out of his fulness to make you abundantly rich. The dejection you feel at your own insufficiency, is only a subtle rejection of the priesthood of Christ, and proves your blindness with respect to it. If you understood it aright, you would feel a boldness in coming to the throne of grace through him, as the new and living way, by which free access is given us to God.

O that the Holy Spirit, who alone is able, would open our understandings to contemplate, in the light of truth, the glorious atonement of Christ, the efficacy of his merits, and the benefits of his intercession! May he graciously prevent any of us from rejecting them by unbelief, frivolity, worldly-mindedness, and the love of sin; and, on the contrary, multiply the number of those who are made meet to partake of the glorious fruits of the Saviour's sublime and wondrous work! Amen.

XXIX.

RIMMON-PAREZ.

NUMB. xxxiii. 19.

“ And they departed from Rithmah, and pitched at Rimmon-parez.”

THE children of Israel had been already about two years on their journey to a country, which they might have reached with less trouble in as many weeks, had they been permitted to choose their own way, according to the dictates of human reason, and had not followed the direction of the cloudy pillar. They would not then have so easily had to suffer from hunger and thirst; bread from heaven would not then have been rained down upon them, nor water have been given them by a continued miracle from the smitten rock. It would not then have been necessary to live in such entire dependance upon God, neither would they have become so well acquainted with him or themselves. They would not then have received so many a castigation as was now the case with them, nor would a thousand divine purposes have been accomplished, several of which are mentioned in the chapter above quoted. But however strange and contrary to reason was their path, yet the occasion of it was thus men-

tioned by the greatest prophet of the Old Testament, "He led Israel about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him."

The Israelites were still very near the borders of Canaan, and this fifteenth station, together with the sixteenth, and Rithmah the fourteenth, lie at an equal distance from the promised land, and each of them is only a few miles remote from the other. Do we ask, what great benefit, or what important objects were to be attained by such short removals, since the smallest change of place was a cause of very great trouble, on account of the taking down and re-fixing of the encampment? we are obliged to content ourselves with Elihu's answer, "He giveth no account of any of his matters." Love alone is our guide, which leads us first in one way, and then in another. It cannot fail to lead aright, and bring every thing to a blessed termination.

With Canaan constantly in view, they cherished the hope that the pillar of cloud, by a slight deviation to the right, would bring them entirely into the promised land. The path of the Christian also seems often to lie on the borders of Canaan. He enjoys, at such times, unspeakable communications of divine influence. A light shines upon him, in which he feels he is saved. The peace of God pervades him, which passeth all understanding, and keeps his heart and mind in Christ Jesus. He feels such an agreement and unison with God, that his whole soul assents to every thing, and lies like an infant in his arms, and lets him bear and

carry it. He possesses a faith and confidence in God through Christ, which nothing seems able to shake. Every shadow of doubt is dispelled by the light in which he walks, and heavenly-mindedness is the predominant feeling of his bosom. Love, like a molli-fying oil, pervades his whole mind, and manifests its gentle and mighty influence in expelling every thing of an opposite nature. It forgives, and bears all things. If he be in a state of suffering, the heart submits to every thing with amiable resignation. Jesu's whole yoke is easy and his burden light. The world, with all it contains, becomes utterly insignificant, but intense the longing to be entirely present with the Lord.

Such is frequently the case, not only with the pious sick, but also with such as are well. The former ardently expect their probable dissolution. They rejoice in the prospect of soon terminating their pilgrimage, and of laying aside their clayey tenement, which burdens them in such a manifold manner, so that they may at length exclaim, "The snare is broken, and we are escaped." When lo! instead of the wished-for termination, they are called back again into life. Health returns, and they must again mingle with the world and its affairs, and again buckle on their armour for the fight. It seems hard to them to have been so near to Canaan, and yet compelled to leave it again; to have arrived at the entrance of the harbour, and yet be beaten back into the stormy ocean. And those in health who were thus so richly comforted, and who had thought they had found an house like the swallow, and like Job, expected to die in their nest—that now their peace would flow as a river, and their righteous-

ness as the waves of the sea—are frequently again driven back under the law, into repentance and into poverty, whilst they calculated on proceeding unremittingly forward from faith to faith, and from strength to strength. Nevertheless, it is in reality no retrograde movement. Decreasing is increasing. When weak, we may increase in strength. The entrance into Canaan is at a very different place to what they supposed, and very different events occur to those which they anticipated.

Such was the case also with the children of Israel, and during the thirty-five subsequent years, until their entry into the promised land, scarcely any thing is mentioned but the names of their places of encampment. The people, by the dreadful events at Rithmah, where the earth opened beneath the feet of the rebellious party, were intimidated and humbled for a long period. The manna continued to fall every day from heaven as usual, and was no longer any thing uncommon to them; the water constantly followed them from the rock, which was Christ, and they no longer wondered at it, even as the divine favours we daily enjoy, are of little value in our estimation. Their shoes did not wear out, nor their clothes grow old. Their manner of life had great uniformity and sameness, and they contented themselves with it as well as they were able. They were indeed obliged, from time to time, at the intimation of the pillar of cloud and of fire, to strike their tents, change their place of encampment, and erect their tabernacles again, without knowing why or wherefore, and without knowing whether they were approaching nearer to or removing further

from Canaan. They were to be without will, without choice, and without any knowledge of their path, to settle themselves no where, nor to hasten forwards, but live and rest in continual dependance, and go or stay as the Lord pleased, and thus serve the Lord according to his good pleasure, and not according to theirs.

We remark upon this, first, that believers seem occasionally as if they were forgotten, either by other Christians, who no longer visit them nor regard them, and who show them no sympathy nor compassion, and this is painful to them—or else they feel solitary, because they find no one to whom they could fully disclose themselves. But still more painful is it, when the Lord seems to have forgotten us; of which we find many instances in the Psalms. But the Lord says, “Can a woman forget her child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget! yet will I not forget thee. I have graven thee on the palms of my hands.” In due time the Lord remembers us, as Moses says in Deut. ii. 7, “The Lord knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness; these forty years the Lord thy God has been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing.”

Secondly, Many pious individuals, until a certain period, are able circumstantially to relate and describe every thing which passes in and with them, and can recount their guidance from step to step, for the instruction and edification of others. They are able to detail their struggles, conflicts, labours, victories, consolations, and mistakes as they occurred. But the facility to do this frequently disappears in the sequel; they arrive at *Rimmon-parez*, where little to be related occurs, and

multiplicity assumes a more simple form ; it is either no longer so striking, or else more spiritual. They begin to regard many things in a very different light.

Thirdly, in time, certain gifts also disappear, with which the Christian was previously clothed ; as, for instance, the ability of remembering and communicating, by which some have it in their power to retain whole sermons and recapitulate them in a pleasing manner ; a peculiar animation, by which every thing received an interesting, lively, and striking form, either mournful or pleasing, by which the mind was powerfully excited, so that either the countenance shone with cheerfulness, or love to the Lord frequently vented itself in gentle tears. The reading or hearing the Word of God, the reception of the sacrament, the consideration of the sufferings of Christ, or prayer, are able to place the soul in a species of ecstasy, so that it almost might say with John, “ I was in the spirit on the Lord’s day.” But all this may lose itself, so that the individual has no longer the ability, or enjoys it no more in such a manner as before, or even finds no longer such a relish for it, and becomes less susceptible. But “ my grace is sufficient for thee ; my strength is mighty in the weak.” Jesus desires to reign alone. Nor does he withdraw any thing, without afterwards restoring it ennobled. We are easily pleased with ourselves in the possession of these gifts, unmindful of the giver. Israel travelled through the desert without provisions. But the Lord was instead of every thing else, and thus they never suffered want, or if this was ever the case, it was only that they might have new proofs of the Lord’s all-sufficiency.

No further mention is now made of the history of the children of Israel. We have nothing but the names of their various places of encampment until they reach Kadesh. I cannot, however, abstain from its further consideration, although the latter must be confined to a single word and its signification. May the words of our mouths be acceptable in the sight of the Lord, and may he bless it to our further edification !

This fifteenth station, near the borders of Canaan, is called Rimmon-parez, the divided pomegranate. This latter is a fruit which flourishes only in warmer climates than those which we inhabit. We have already described it as of the size of a large apple, with a thick and hard shell, of a greenish and yellowish colour, filled with deep-red juicy berries, which, being pressed out, afford a pleasing, cooling, and refreshing aliment, both to the sick and those in health. When ripe, these berries show themselves through a rent, which has a very pleasing appearance. Pomegranates were interwoven into the robe of the High Priest, with golden bells between, which emitted a sound as he walked into the sanctuary, that the people might be favourably remembered before the Lord. A striking emblem, therefore, of the rent veil of the Redeemer's flesh, through whose bleeding wounds the infinite love and tender compassion of his heart are seen by the eye of faith, and all the blessings purchased by his death, as well as a freedom of access into the holy place, the innermost sanctuary, the immediate habitation and throne of the Most High.

Pomegranates are a delicious and desirable fruit ; hence the spies brought them with them from the land of Canaan, together with the grapes from Eschcol, for

the purpose of exhibiting them to the children of Israel as a proof of the richness of the soil. There are seasons also in the experience of the Christian, when the blessings of the promised land of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost are presented in a more than usually lively manner to his soul; when he sits under the shadow of the beloved of his soul, with great delight, and his fruit is sweet unto his taste. Then it is that he exclaims with the bride in the Song of Solomon, "Stay me with apples, comfort me with flaggons, for I am sick of love!"

May this be the experience of every weary pilgrim to the promised land, so that his thirst being assuaged and his powers invigorated, he may go on his way rejoicing! Amen.

XXX.

LIBNAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 20.

“And they departed from Rimmon-parez, and pitched in Libnah.”

THIS sixteenth station likewise lies not far from the borders of Canaan, which is to the right. The route leads in a straight line towards the high road, as if it were not directed towards the Red Sea, but straight into Egypt. Libnah is only about three leagues from Rimmon, and it might be asked, whether such a short stage were worth all the trouble occasioned by removing? We reply in the affirmative. Self-will may thereby receive a wound, and self-wisdom be reproved, whose advice is not asked, nor its approval waited for, as little as its disapproval is heeded; the new man has an opportunity of manifesting his patience and obedience, the old man of showing his perverseness. The strictness of the divine government is made apparent, which extends to the numbering of every hair, however little we may believe it. The children of Israel, however, enjoyed the certainty of being where the Lord

would have them to be; and we can also enjoy this, if we do not act in our own strength and from self-will, but regulate ourselves according to his word, prefer refraining from things that are dubious, and fix our hopes on the Lord, that he would instruct us and show us the way in which we ought to walk. We have then to do with a merciful Lord, who pardons unintentional mistakes, and whose long suffering we must regard as salvation. The nearness of Canaan, and the prospect it presented, must indeed have been a constant martyrdom, since they were not permitted to enter it. This was to take place at a very different point, previous to which, much was to be endured and experienced, and many to leave their corpses in the wilderness.

Let us, however, consider this sixteenth encampment a little more closely. It is called Libnah, and this is all that is said of it. The term in our language means whiteness, being white, or being made white; even as it is said in Daniel xii. 10, "Many shall be purified and *made white*, and tried." The moon has also its name from it, as well as frankincense, tiles, and poplar-trees. These interpretations afford us subjects for further meditation, especially the white colour.

The latter was the prevailing colour in the Old Testament worship, and next to it, purple, scarlet, and azure blue; but black was entirely excluded. The priests were clothed in white. Herod caused a white mantle to be put upon Christ, and thus sent him back to Pilate. Angels appear clothed in white. White raiment is promised in Rev. iii. 4, to those that overcome, and who are worthy of it. In verse 18th we are counselled to buy white raiment that we may be clothed, and not be ashamed on account of our nakedness. In Rev. i.

the Lord is described as having his head and hair white like wool : and in chap. xix. 14, the whole host of heaven are represented as “ clothed in fine linen, clean and white.” David prays, in Psalm li., “ Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow ;” and the Lord promises, in Isaiah. i. 18, “ Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow ;” From all which passages it is evident, that white is emblematical of holiness and innocence, and being made white is equivalent, in a spiritual sense, to becoming holy. Consequently every one must go to Libnah ; and it were well if we were really encamped there.

By nature we are black, the reverse of white ; we are flesh, the opposite of spirit ; and we are enemies of God, unholy and unclean. “ Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean ?” asks Job. Our very righteousness, in such a state, according to the judgment of God, is a filthy rag. We have lost the image of God, and resemble him no longer. We are black, instead of being white—darkness, instead of light. Such is our conception and birth, and in them David finds the primary source of his grievous sin. The germ of evil is within us, as soon as we see the light, and waits only for a seasonable opportunity to manifest itself. This hereditary evil is that in particular which defiles us ; the leprosy which disfigures us. This corrupt tree manifests itself also in a greater or less degree, in a more or less striking manner, sometimes even most disgustingly, in its poisonous fruits of evil thoughts, lusts, desires, passions, words, and works, as so many proofs how poisonous must be the tree which yields them, and how corrupt the heart from whence they proceed.

This sinful state separates us from God and from each other. We no longer suit each other nor agree together. For what fellowship hath light with darkness, or Christ with Belial? Our carnal nature hates God, and God hates our carnal nature, which is enmity against him, and being so much opposed to his nature, must therefore be overcome, mortified, and slain, before he can take up his residence in us. His holiness is to our impurity a consuming fire; and even Isaiah exclaimed at the sight of it, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" What would become of us were there no Libnah, where we might be made white!

Eternal thanks and praise to God, there is such a Libnah! God is merciful, it is true; more so than we can comprehend or conceive; but this is also true with respect to his holiness, which must be satisfied before the former can manifest itself. For the exercise of mercy is free; but that of holiness and justice is indispensable. His merciful wisdom found out a wondrous means of preparing for us a Libnah, where we might be made white, and of opening for us a fountain for all sin and uncleanness, where, sprinkled with pure water, we might be cleansed from all our impurities and our idols. It may now be said in its full extent, what was formerly said in a very limited sense of the typical day of atonement, "that ye may be clean from all your sins before the Lord." (Lev. xvi. 30.) On that day flowed the blood of the Son of God, which cleanses from all sin. A perfect atonement was then made for all sin. God then became perfectly reconciled to the sinner, the power of Satan was annulled, the entrance to life thrown open; Christ then accomplished the propitiation for our sins by himself; and from being

objects of abhorrence, we became acceptable in the beloved.

But we are now enjoined to proceed to Libnah, whither we are directed by the pillar of cloud and of fire, that we may be made white; or, in other words, “follow after holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” He that goes to Libnah will be aware of the extent of his defilement. Even in Solomon’s time there were those who “were pure in their own eyes, and yet were not washed from their filthiness;” (Prov. xxx. 12,) and such there are also in the present day. But acknowledge thy transgression, be black in thine own eyes, so as to become displeased with thyself, thou hast then taken the first step to Libnah, and wilt also take the second, when thou feelest the necessity of being cleansed. So as thou art, thou canst have no fellowship with God, and canst neither please nor serve him. If thou continue as thou art by nature, there is for thee no heaven and no salvation. There is much in thee that must be eradicated, much that must be wrought in thee, and which nothing but the grace of God in Christ is able to effect. He asserts in the most solemn manner, that unless thou art born again, thou shalt not enter into the kingdom of God. There is an inheritance; but it is an inheritance for saints in the light, and the being made meet for it, is something great and indispensable. There is a heaven, but nothing common or unclean can enter there. Happy art thou, if thou feelest the importance of these truths, and confessest with John, “I have need to be washed of thee;” and with Peter, “Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.”

Thou wilt take the third step to Libnah, when thou

seekest purification from all thy sins, in a very heart-felt manner. Thus it was with David, "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin!" What is more deserving of our search than the white robe of innocence and holiness, the purification of our souls through the remission of sins and regeneration? This robe entitles us to partake of the heavenly marriage-feast. Ought we to adorn our bodies and neglect our souls? Ought we to dislike dirt on our bodies or any disfiguring mark, and suffer our souls to be covered and deformed by spots and defilement? This would be highly absurd, and be attended with awful consequences. He that is wise seeks with the greatest earnestness the purification of his soul from all its sins, and considers the forgiveness of sins and the renewing of his heart as an invaluable treasure.

When the individual is brought to regard his blackness and defilement with sorrow, and to perceive, in a lively manner, the necessity of purification, and with his whole heart to desire it; he then begins to feel the impossibility of accomplishing it by his own efforts. When it is said to him, "Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, and I will be your God"—"Follow after holiness, and purify yourselves from all pollution of flesh and spirit"—"Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us"—"Put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; but be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new man, who, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness"—such important

commandments as these excite him to serious activity, so that he can scarcely stay to take breath. But what is the result? Job shall answer. "If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean, yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me; for he is not a man as I am, that I should answer him, why therefore do I labour in vain?"

But be it taken for granted, that the making white of our black hearts, the purification of our souls from sin, is a work which far exceeds all our strength; be it a fact what is said in Jerem. ii. 22, "Though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me;" yet there is a Libnah, where Ethiopians can be made white. In the same prophet (chap. xxx. 12, &c.) it is said, "Thy bruise is incurable and thy wound is grievous, there is none to plead thy cause that thou mayest be bound up; thou hast no healing medicine, yet I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord. And out of them shall proceed the voice of thanksgiving and of them that make merry, and I will multiply them." If sin is powerful, grace is much more so. We possess a Saviour. He came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, and has perfectly succeeded. His blood and his spirit coalesce to work the mighty change, the purification and making white of the soul. By the former it is justified; by the latter renewed into his image; by the one, exculpated from all sin at the bar of God, and replaced in its lost right to eternal life; and by the other, made like unto him. The former blots out sin; the latter eradicates

it. The one takes place at once, and perfectly; the latter gradually, until its final consummation in heaven.

Now when the individual, in the light of the Holy Spirit, discovers this opened fountain for sin and uncleanness, in its two-fold power, he casts himself into it with entire confidence; expecting every thing from it, and nothing from himself; and experiences, with astonishment, its wondrous efficacy. A mighty change at once takes place; a change of which he previously formed no idea. Sin is expelled, and has vanished like a mist before the Sun of Righteousness. It exists no longer, either in its accusing remembrance or its tempting attacks. "Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Such wonders take place at Libnah; which then becomes a *Lebona*, frankincense. Thank-offerings ascend, and one cloud of the incense of praise after another. "Once I was blind, now I see." Once I was dead, now I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Once I was black as midnight, now white as snow; "fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners." Such is Libnah*on the borders of Canaan. Is it not good to be there? Shall we not erect our tabernacles there?

But what is said in Ezekiel xxiv. 13? "Because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged; thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused my fury to rest upon thee." Let us listen to what is elsewhere said. "I will thoroughly purge thy dross, and take away all thy tin. I will choose thee in the furnace of affliction." "He shall sit as a

refiner, and purify the sons of Levi, then shall their offering be acceptable." "The Father of Spirits chastises us, that we may be partakers of his holiness." "Through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God." "These are they that have come out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." According to these rules we are treated at Libnah, and hence it is sometimes painful to dwell there.

There are particular seasons at Libnah, when the Lord comforts the individual in a very pleasing and invigorating manner, so that he runs in the way of his commandments, and if he does not mount up as on wings of eagles into those higher regions, where no storm rages nor mists arise, yet he runs and is not weary, and walks and is not faint; when he enjoys the animating influences of the vivifying Spirit, as well as the soothing power of the blood and the cleansing quality of the water in rich abundance; when, instructed by "the grace that bringeth salvation, he denies ungodliness and worldly lusts, and lives soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world, waiting for that blessed hope and the bright appearance of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who has given himself for us, that he might redeem us from all unrighteousness, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." The soul then experiences such a measure of patience, resignation, and love as causes it to feel astonished.

The church, in Solomon's Song, (vi. 5), is compared to the moon, "fair as the moon;" which derives all her light from the sun, without which she would only be a dark mass; so the church derives every thing from

Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, which makes it also a bright and shining light, dispelling the obscurity of the night. But the moon is subject to change; at one time waxing, at another waning; sometimes only like a narrow bow, at others its whole surface enlightened, and also occasionally suffering an eclipse. Still it continues to revolve in its sphere. The church is also subject to many changes, and even to hostile attacks, but it stands firmly founded upon a rock. Therefore, though like the moon here below, yet in her father's house she shall shine as the sun in the firmament.

Proceed, therefore, to Libnah, that ye may be made white. Wash you, and let yourselves be cleansed, that you may become whiter than snow. Put away every evil thing out of the Lord's sight. Cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek after righteousness. "Come now, therefore, and let us reason together," saith the Lord, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow, though red like crimson, they shall be as wool." "If ye will hearken to my voice, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be slain by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it."

XXXI.

RISSAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 21.

“And they removed from Libnah, and pitched at Rissah.”

THIS seventeenth encampment begins to deviate from Canaan towards Egypt, in a direct line with Succoth, their first station, without having the Red Sea between them, and is only about three leagues from Libnah. But because the fiery and cloudy pillar put itself in motion, the Israelites were also obliged to do so, although they perhaps saw little reason for it. It being determined that they should return to the shores of the Red Sea, it would probably have been more agreeable to them to make long marches, than such short stations; but reason was obliged to be silent in the matter. I know as little whether they travelled by night or day, as I do how long they were obliged to remain in a place. In every case it was the desert, let them stay where they would. They made it, however, as convenient as they were able, in which they were aided by Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses, who travelled with

them at his urgent request, because, being acquainted with the desert, he could direct them where they might best encamp. Hence Moses said to him, "Thou shalt be as an eye to us." Hobab signifies, bearing love in the bosom; this is applicable to our heavenly Shepherd, who thereby alleviates many a painful step. Hence Moses says, in Deut. xxxiii. 3, "How he loved the people! All his saints are in his hand." It is, however, remarkable that Moses should be so urgent for his brother-in-law to accompany them, for the reason above-mentioned; since they were led by the pillar of cloud and of fire. But the Lord never leaves his people entirely without alleviation in their sufferings, although he himself had none.

We know nothing more of this encampment, but its name, which signifies "sprinkling." It stands in beautiful connection with the previous station as the cause to the effect; for the fruit of spiritual sprinkling is the being made white.

The worship of the tabernacle and temple included in it many sprinklings. They were performed with the blood of the beasts offered for sacrifice, as also with oil, and with water. The sprinkling took place towards the temple and the mercy seat in the most holy place. Particularly remarkable is the blood of the paschal lamb, in which the children of Israel dipped a bunch of hyssop and sprinkled the door-posts and lintel of their dwellings, that the destroying angel might pass over. To this David refers in Psalm li. where he gives it a spiritual meaning, and prays, saying, "Purge me with hyssop;" it was also used in the cleansing of leprous persons. This paschal lamb is one of the greatest typical representations of our redemption by

Christ. Hence Paul says, "Christ our passover was slain for us."

It is also remarkable, that the blood which was shed on Horeb for the confirmation of the covenant, was also sprinkled upon the people, as a sign and pledge of their part in the blessings and benefits of that covenant. Nor less remarkable is the sprinkling of blood by the high priest, on the great day of atonement, by which the purification of Israel's sins was typically effected. These solemn sprinklings are all eminent typical representations of the redemption, justification, and sanctification of the church, by the blood and spirit of Christ.

Besides these, there was also a daily sprinkling in the daily morning and evening sacrifice for sin, as well as, in particular cases, the sprinkling with the ashes of a red cow, which afforded Levitical purification. All these together are figures of the glorious effects of the blood and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Ezekiel makes an allusion to the spiritual signification of this ceremony, when, in ch. xxxvi. 25, he says, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.—Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. Not for your sakes, do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you."

In the New Testament, there is also a sprinkling with the water of baptism, by which the inward purification of the soul, through the remission of sins and regeneration, is typified and sealed. The term "sprink-

ling" occurs not unfrequently in the New Testament. Thus, in Heb. x. 22, it is said, "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." In ch. xii. 24, the Apostle numbers it amongst New Testament privileges, that we "are come to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel." And in 1 Peter i. 2, the Apostle uses the expression, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

Sacrifice is not complete without sprinkling, and the latter is nothing else than the appropriation and real impartation of the power and effect of the sacrifice offered up, on the soul. The offering has reference to God, the sprinkling to man, who is by this means connected with the offering. The sprinkling places him in the real possession of the purchased benefits and blessings. Even the Jews find in the sprinkling a great mystery, and maintain that it is the chief thing in a sacrifice; and that not without reason; for by it is typified, not only that Christ himself, sprinkled with his own blood—when, by the shedding of it, and by his perfect obedience, he had sanctified himself for his people—should stand accepted before his Father continually; but also that its efficacy should be imparted by the preaching of the gospel to every believer amongst all the nations of the earth.

Even as the sprinkling took place by the finger of the priest, so Christ, by his divine power, offered his blood to the Father, and, by the finger of his Spirit, appropriates that, which he has purchased for them, to

those that in every age believe in his name. The sprinkling was performed crosswise, and signified how Christ crucified should be preached, and as such, should be presented to all nations as the sole object of their faith. It was frequently done by a sprinkler, made of a piece of cedar and a bunch of hyssop, which was tied to the cedar with twice-dyed scarlet wool. The cedar-tree is the loftiest and most elegant of all trees—an emblem of the glory of Christ our head, by means of which he pours forth his heavenly blessings into us, his members. Cedar has a pleasant smell, and these blessings render us acceptable to God ; it is oleaginous, and this indicates the true unction ; it is valuable, and what is more so, or of equal worth to the gifts of Christ ; it is not subject to decay, and the blessings of his redemption are imperishable. Hyssop is the lowliest amongst plants, and of an agreeable smell ; emblematic of the atoning lowliness of Christ, especially of humility, in which he called himself a worm, and which likewise pleases him so much, that he gives grace to the humble. The twice-dyed scarlet wool is indicative of his suretyship, the fruit which results from the union of his lowliness and dignity. All these three things are represented in the words of the gospel, and laid as the basis of all consolation for the sinner.

“ Without shedding of blood there is no remission.” The shedding of blood under the Old Testament dispensation has ceased, and necessarily must cease, after the invaluable blood of Jesus Christ was shed, as he himself says, “ for the remission of sins.” It possesses supreme worth and efficacy. Supreme worth, for it is the blood of a *man*, which is of such value, that it can

be compensated only by blood ; for according to divine command, “ Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” It is the blood of an *innocent* man, like whom none is so innocent ; of a *holy* man, with whom none can compare, and which, on this account, also deserves to be denominated the *precious* blood, as Peter calls it. Nor is this all. It is the blood of a *Saviour*—the blood of Christ, the Supreme Prophet, sole High Priest, and most exalted King—of one who was anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure—the blood of one, whom all the angels adore, and whom all men must honour, even as they honour the Father ; in one word, it is blood of the *Son of God*, the blood of God, as Paul calls it, (Acts xx. 28,) by which he has ransomed his church. Therefore who can reckon the value of such blood ? What is all the gold and silver compared to it. And what shall we say, when we reflect, that we are redeemed with such a price from all our sins and the power of Satan ! Well may it be said, we are dearly bought !

Glorious is the power and efficacy of this blood. “ We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” (Ephes. i. 7.) “ We are justified by his blood.” “ God hath set him forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood.” “ It cleanses us from all sin,” and his people overcome the old serpent “ through the blood of the Lamb.” “ By his own blood he hath entered once for all into the holy place, and is become the author of eternal salvation.” “ How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God, purge

your consciences from dead works to serve the living God!" And when Christ himself, on presenting the cup, in the holy sacrament, places the New Testament or covenant in his blood, he teaches us, that all the blessings of the covenant of grace are contained in his blood, or spring from it. But what is his blood else than his meritorious sufferings collectively?

This blood has a two-fold operation; first, on heaven and heavenly things. By it they have become acceptable to us. If a land, as the prophet says, casts out its inhabitants because of their transgressions; how much more heaven and heavenly things must reject us, who are such abominable sinners from our very birth, and amongst us such dreadful ones! They would oppose themselves to all fellowship with us, and the heavenly dove avoid such disgusting haunts. But now are they reconciled through the blood of the Son of God, and access to them is opened out to us.

This blood, secondly, manifests its transmuting power on the elect themselves, for it is a living blood, our life is in it; "We have now, therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh." (Heb. x. 19, 20.)

With this blood we must be sprinkled, as the Scripture expresses it, and as typified in the rites of the Old Testament worship—that is, its consoling, cleansing, and vivifying power must manifest itself in our hearts and consciences by the Holy Spirit. It is, therefore, not enough that we possess a mere knowledge of the nature and passive obedience of Christ, or

are able to speak of it in a scriptural manner, or agree to that which others say of it ; it is not enough that we appropriate his merits to ourselves by our own power and reason, and by a self-made faith and hope for salvation on account of it ; it is not enough that we immediately receive the word with joy, believe for a time, and yet the word have no root in us ; nor is it enough that we do, suffer, and renounce many things. We must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ and the water of the Holy Spirit for our purification—our *understanding* sprinkled, that it may obtain quite a different view of itself, of the truth, of God, Jesus Christ, and the way of salvation, to that which it previously possessed, however learned that might be—a view by which the individual may become a worthless sinner, but Christ the chief, yea, sole object of his desire and his confidence—our *hearts* sprinkled, that they may be filled with new feelings of sorrow for sin, even a godly sorrow, with love to God in Christ, and with a disposition to renounce every thing in order to win Christ—our *consciencs* sprinkled, that they may be cleansed from dead works, from accusation and condemnation on account of sin, and filled with a cheerful confidence towards God—our *wills* sprinkled, that they may be united with the divine will, and easily bend themselves, like pliant wax, into every form—our *affections* sprinkled, so that hatred and love, desire and disgust may be directed to their proper objects—our *whole being* sprinkled, so that every destroying angel, every evil must pass over us, like the blood-sprinkled tents of Israel, without daring to approach us ; so that sin, Satan, and death must set us at

liberty, as belonging to another master, however much they may still assail us—sprinkled, once and for ever, till the sprinkling, in its seven-fold repetition, attains its celestial completion. It gives the individual an inestimable privilege, real nobility, and eternal salvation. It is true, it has its degrees ; it commences here, and continues until all that is in part is done away, and that which is perfect comes.

Such is the blessing which, figuratively speaking, is found at Rissah, where a pleasing dew descends, an allusion to which is also contained in that word. Encamping at Rissah, therefore, implies a being sprinkled with, and a being acted upon by the blood and spirit of Jesus Christ. Jesus touches the leper, and he is made clean ; a diseased female touches the hem of his garment, and is made whole. He lays his hands on the blind man, and the latter receives his sight ; he puts his finger into the deaf man's ear, and hearing returns ; he touches the tongue of the dumb, who immediately regains his utterance.

Such is the being encamped at Rissah. The soul now powerfully experiences what is implied in the blood and spirit of Christ, and what is meant by drinking his blood—how all evil flees before it, and all salvation gathers round it. The man no longer regrets having encamped amongst the thorny juniper-bushes of Rithmah, nor at having endured the sharp ablutions at Libnah, since both of them contributed to lead him to Rissah.

But let us be extremely desirous and earnest that the sprinkling with the blood and spirit of Jesus Christ may be fully consummated and perfected upon us, that

we may more and more fully experience the operation of both, so far as this can be the case here below. It is true, it will only manifest itself in all the riches of its glory in the world to come, in those who have participated in its primary influences here below, and who long for the adoption, and wait for the redemption of the body.

XXXII.

KEHELATHAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 22.

“ And they journeyed from Rissah, and pitched in Kehelathah.”

THE remarks we have made on the position and direction of the three preceding encampments, applies likewise to the present ; respecting which we know nothing more, than that it signifies a congregation. The word is applicable, not merely to a civil assembly, but also to a religious meeting, congregation, church. It may be, that various assemblies and consultations were held here upon a variety of important objects. Religious meetings were doubtless also held, where, under the direction of estimable, prudent, kind, and devout individuals, the people assembled in larger or smaller companies, sang, prayed, edified, comforted, encouraged, instructed, and warned each other.

When a person has been sprinkled with the blood and spirit of Jesus Christ, the next and necessary con-

sequence is, that he joins himself to those who have obtained the same faith and the same mercy. Like seeks its like. There is also an obvious blessing, in such an assembling together, when it does not arise from form and legality, but when all are impelled by the wind of the Spirit, where love, reciprocal esteem, modesty, and humility, form the bond of union, and when they not merely instruct, but admonish, comfort, and candidly reprove each other, and suffer themselves to be reprovèd. Where this is the case, small assemblies have, on the whole, a decided preference to numerous ones. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name," says Christ, "there am I in the midst of them."

If we wish to give a spiritual meaning to this encampment, we find it explained in the words of the Apostle, (Heb. xii. 22.) "Ye are come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels and to the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven." These words express but one idea, "Ye are members of the true church." By the church, is understood, in its most extensive sense, all who profess the truth, where good and evil, believers and unbelievers, regenerate and unconverted, are mingled together, until separated at the great judgment day. In this point of view, it resembles paganism more than christianity. But the true church is like a rose amongst thorns: there is still wheat amongst this chaff, and a holy seed amidst a crooked and perverse nation. Amongst all sects and parties, there are at least some true sheep of Christ. The real church is composed of that select assembly, which the Son of God collects, protects, and

preserves, out of the whole human race, in the true faith unto eternal life, from the beginning of time unto the end of the world ; so that only those can be called true Christians, who by real faith are become members of Christ, and thus partake of his anointing, so that they confess his name in word and deed, present themselves as a living sacrifice to him who has bought them, strive, in this world, with a free conscience against sin and the devil, and afterwards reign with him in eternity over every creature. A true Christian is therefore a most exalted personage, and to be or become one is the height of happiness and honour. Hence the Apostle states it as a sublime privilege, in the passage just quoted, to attain to and become a member of this church.

Here below, it is a church militant, in the world above, a church triumphant, which has every adversary under its feet ; because it there reigns with Christ, here fights and conquers. The passage above quoted regards it in this two-fold point of view. For Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, has reference to that part of the church which is still engaged in the conflict, even as most of the following expressions refer to its glory in the heavenly world. Let us devote a short time to the consideration of it.

The *head* of the church, which comprehends all that is holy, blessed, and devoted to God, is God himself ; its foundation is Jesus Christ, in whom all things are gathered together under one head, both which are in heaven and on earth, even in him. (Ephes. i. 10.) “ Since by him all things are reconciled to himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross.” (Col. i. 20.) It is therefore invincible, whatever may

assail or seek to insinuate itself, and ever remains victorious, even when succumbing. Whatever may befall it here, yet to all its members is said individually, "Ye are come to Mount Zion." Zion, in its literal sense, was a mount in Jerusalem, which had two summits. Upon the one, which was peculiarly called Zion, stood the royal palace; on the other, called Moriah, the manifestation of the Lord, where Abraham was on the point of offering up his son Isaac, Solomon built, according to divine direction, the temple, both figures of Christ in his kingly and priestly office. Hence the Scriptures speak in glowing terms of Zion. "Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth is Mount Zion." (Ps. xlviii. 3.) "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God." (Ps. lxxxvii. 3.) "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion, more than all the dwellings of Jacob." (v. 2.) "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it." (Isaiah ii. 2.) And chap. lx. contains a very glorious description of Zion, of the people of God in their glorified state.

Hence Zion is the church of God in its New Testamental perfection, particularly here upon earth. To be "come to Mount Zion," therefore, means to be engrafted into the true church, and participate in all the glorious privileges ascribed to it in the word of God, in all the glorious promises made to it, in all the love and care of God for Zion; in all the glory appropriated to it, and consequently to be supremely blessed. Peter addresses such characters as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar

people, to show forth the virtues of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light."

In accordance with this promise, every citizen of Zion ought to deal with God, as David did when he said, "Thou hast said, seek ye my face. Therefore, O Lord, thy face will I seek." However low their station in life, however poor and disregarded they may be, however persecuted, oppressed, and despised, and though all things may appear to set themselves against them; yet all the glories of Zion are theirs, and kept in reversion for them by God himself. All things must work together for their good, and eventually they shall shine as the sun in the kingdom of their father.

No greater blessing can befall any one than to arrive at Zion, were he even to be numbered amongst the meanest of her citizens, and bear a considerable part of her burdens. But we arrive there only by the narrow way of repentance and self-denial, and the strait gate of regeneration, which is found by few. Nor can it be attained without conflict, sorrow, pain, and sacrifice. But if through the mercy of God you have arrived there, walk more and more worthy of the gospel and its privileges; be thankful for the mercy vouchsafed to you; rejoice in your felicity, and be prepared by it to all obedience. "Be joyful in hope, patient in tribulation, instant in prayer."

This privilege the Apostle otherwise expresses, when he adds, "and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem." That which he had just called a mount, he now calls a city. Thus John saw its glory, like that of a city, the streets of which were of gold,

intersected by a crystalline stream, planted on both sides with fruit trees, bearing twelve manner of fruits, with foundations of precious stones, gates of pearl, without a sun, and without a temple, the Lord being both.

A city gives the idea of greatness, security, order, beauty, and abundance. And believers are, by grace, placed in a city which contains and presents this to our view in the highest sense. This city is great, for it extends from the beginning of the world to the end of it, it comprehends all ages and nations; for "in every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." It extends itself from earth to heaven, and there is yet room in it.

This city affords perfect security and repose. Out of it rages the foe, death destroys, the law thunders and lightens, anger burns, misery reigns. "But though the earth be removed, the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, the waters thereof roar and are troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet there is a river, the streams of which make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High. God is in the midst of her. She shall not be moved." (Ps. xlv. 2—5.) How strong are its inhabitants! The weakest thereof shall be as David; for in every conflict, they come off more than conquerors. However weak they may be, yet Christ is their strength, and though babes in knowledge, yet the Lord instructs them. The Lord is a wall of fire round about them, and they shall never perish.

Order prevails in this city. It is only in the order of repentance, faith, renunciation of the world and self, obedience, and submission, that we enter through the

gates into the city ; and he who seeks to be something, must previously be content to be nothing. One will alone prevails amongst the countless numbers of its inhabitants, one Spirit alone pervades them ; here all is harmony, peace, and love. Disorder, confusion, and discord are the elements of the kingdom of darkness, and reign universally, except in this blest abode, where nothing is done by the strength and ability of its inhabitants, except as the Lord giveth all things that pertain unto life and godliness.

This city is supremely beautiful. Out of it, every thing is hateful and deformed, crooked and crippled, filthy and leprous. But he that enters this city becomes well proportioned, fair, and beautiful. He is washed from every spot and defilement, and bears the impress of the divine image.

Within this city reigns also the most desirable abundance. Without its walls, there may be imaginary riches, but at the same time, a real and entire destitution of substantial possessions. He that enters into this city is made rich, all things belong to its inhabitants, although they may not have them in immediate possession. The naked are clothed in raiment of gold and embroidery, and thus are conducted to the king. To the hungry it is said, " Eat, O friends, drink, yea drink abundantly, O beloved ! " All that we require is there to be had, " without money and without price."

But how can we wonder at the glory of this city, since it is the city of God ? He formed the plan of it from all eternity. He erected it by his Son. He has filled it with inhabitants by his Spirit, who are his workmanship. He reigns in it wondrously and glori-

ously. He is the builder and maker of it, and all that it contains. From him it receives its privileges and immunities. He dwells, he walks in it. All his children are here united in one company, "fellow citizens of the saints and of the household of God." Where is there a city like this, where are there citizens like these? If some shine like the sun, others like the moon, and others again as the stars, and one with greater brightness than another, yet they are all one in humility and love.

It is the city of the *living* God, who is powerful enough to preserve and protect it, who alone hath immortality, who maketh alive, who redeemeth from destruction, and whose treasures and resources are inexhaustible.

The Apostle distinguishes it still more particularly, as "the heavenly Jerusalem," the vision of peace. The earthly Jerusalem, at the summit of its splendour under Solomon, was nothing compared with it. This is the new Jerusalem, which John saw coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride for her husband. And heard a great voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be their God."

This is a representation of the church of Jesus Christ, regarded according to that which it is already in him, and which will show itself more fully in future; since hitherto it is only perceived by the eye of faith. Although here on earth, yet it has its origin and root, its citizenship, home, and treasure in heaven, to which its affections are directed. Yet even here it is raised

up together with Jesus, and made to sit together in heavenly places in him ; although whilst here it is subject to temptation, and sorrow, and suffering, which are the means by which the Lord “ stablishes, strengthens, and settles it.”

Thus glorious is the state of believers here upon earth. They are really come to Zion and to the city of the living God. Their names are written in heaven. They are come also to an innumerable multitude of angels, who stand with the church under one Lord, who are sent forth as ministering spirits to minister unto them that shall be heirs of salvation, and as their friends and protectors. They rejoice over every sinner that repenteth, and carry the departing spirit unto Abraham's bosom.

Although still striving and suffering here upon earth, yet they stand in the closest connection with the church above. For they are come “ to the church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven, and to the spirits of the just made perfect.” They constitute with them the elect, whose names are written in the living book of the Lamb, and being in Christ, the first-born Son of God, they become partakers of his nature by escaping the corruption which is in the world through lust.

They are just, but not yet perfected with respect to possession and enjoyment ; a part is so, but these are in heaven. With these they are intimately connected, and even as the former have attained and been made perfect, so shall they also attain.

O what a glorious encampment, therefore, is Kehe-lathah, even though situate in a desert ! Happy art

thou, O Israel! in dwelling there, though in tabernacles, in which thou groanest, being burdened. But “we know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”
Amen.

XXXIII.

SHAPHER.

NUMB. xxxiii. 23.

“ And they went from Kehelathah, and pitched in Mount Shapher.”

STILL further from Canaan, still nearer Egypt, although but a couple of leagues. With respect to the meaning of the name of this nineteenth station, it signifies fair or beautiful. This follows very naturally upon the preceding encampments. If we have been made white at Libnah, received the sprinkling at Rissah, and become real members of Kehelathah, the church of God, we are then beautiful and lovely in the eyes of God and all his saints. What is “the goodly heritage” of the Son of God, other than his church? Does he not address it as his bride? saying, “Thou art all fair my love.” (Sol. Song i. 15.)

The situation of this encampment was probably beautiful, as its name denotes. If the state of the church militant is not always pleasing and glorious, it is also

not one continued scene of sorrow. There are times, when believers can rejoice in spirit and look cheerful and happy. In the desert there are occasionally verdant spots, otherwise who could bear to reside in it for so long a period? "Thou hast turned my mourning into joy," says David. But the children of God must never establish themselves firmly any where. From Shapher they remove to Haradah, terror; because they are obliged to do so. Resign thy self-will, mortify thy own choice, and thou wilt possess peace. "In the day of prosperity, be joyful; in the day of adversity, consider."

This Mount Shapher inclines directly to the right, on the road through Philistia, which is called the nearest. (Exod. xiii. 17,) and in which half the number of days was not required to reach Canaan, for which they were now compelled to take years. The reason which is given for this divine mode of procedure in leading them thus circuitously, is as strange as the procedure itself; for we are told, "God said, Lest peradventure the people repent, when they see war, and return to Egypt." O how wonderful, and yet now he seems to be leading them thither himself. In a few days they might be again in Goshen. "Who hath known the mind of the Lord, or being his counsellor, hath taught him?" If thou canst no longer comprehend thy guidance, close thy eyes and follow. If, contrary to thy wish and will, it seems to go backwards instead of forwards, as thou wast formerly wont to go, and gladly wouldst still, put thy mouth, with Jeremiah, in the dust, and wait and hope in patience. What a commentary is contained in it, upon the immoveable stability of faith; on which account, faith and patience are so often com-

bined ! What a discourse on the faithfulness of God in the fulfilment of his promises, however long a period may elapse, and however intricate may be the course of things ! And how much encouragement might the Israelites derive from the circumstance of carrying the bones of Joseph along with them, which served as a silent preacher to them ! Abraham understood it, and believed against hope, and when nothing was to be hoped for.

Behold the obedience of the Israelites ! Although close upon the high road, yet they are far from resorting to it from their own impulse, in order to escape by the shortest and easiest way from the wilderness, whether to Canaan or to Egypt. How salutary was the severe chastisement they received at Rithmah amongst the juniper bushes ! How tame and docile are they become ! Their conduct corresponds with the words of David, " O Lord, I know that thy judgments are just, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me !"

I am of opinion that this encampment received the name of beautiful and lovely, not merely from its agreeable situation, but also from the good conduct and docility of those that were encamped there. For however many imperfections may occasionally appear amongst Christians, so as to cause an apostle to reprove them for their carnality, yet there were also those, who gave him reason to confess that he thanked God always for them, because that their faith grew exceedingly, and their love towards each other abounded ; adding, " So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God, for your patience and faith." (2 Thess. i. 3, 4.) It is also true in the present day, that there

are little circles which distinguish themselves by their unanimity, love, and other truly christian virtues. Thus ought it to be with all that name the name of Christ; they ought to consider themselves as a city set upon a hill, and so "let their light shine before men, that others, seeing their good works, may glorify their Father in heaven."

We have also many a Mount Shapher, many a beautiful hill. Amongst these are Mount Calvary and the Mount of Olives, the hills from whence cometh our help. Is it not remarkable, that lofty mountains were the scene of the most striking manifestations of God? Thus on Mount Horeb and Mount Sinai, God manifested his holiness, and on Mount Moriah and Zion, he revealed his grace and mercy. From Nebo's summit, the dying Moses beheld the promised land. On Tabor, Jesus was transfigured. A high mountain was frequently the place he selected for passing the whole night in prayer to God. He resorted often with pleasure to the Mount of Olives; there began his sufferings and his glory, and there he blessed his disciples as the first fruits of his church. On Mount Calvary he finished his sacrifice, and at the time of the great contest his feet shall again stand upon the Mount of Olives, according to Zech. xiv. 4. Well may David exclaim therefore, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." (Ps. cxxi.)

Hail, Israel! encamped on Mount Shapher, the hill of beauty; for there we become beautiful. We are not so by nature, and might be properly named Ichabod, the glory of the Lord is departed. But an individual begins to be fair, when he begins to see his ugliness.

And the conviction of our sinful state is the *first* step out of the vale of darkness towards Mount Shapher, where we are made beautiful.

Then follows the *second* step, sorrow for sin. Our merciful Lord cannot resist the tears of repentance. Hezekiah wept sore; and the word of the Lord came to Isaiah, who was sent to say to him, "The Lord hath seen thy tears. Behold I will heal, deliver, and protect thee." When Jesus saw the people weeping at the grave of Lazarus, he could no longer bear it, he was obliged himself to weep, and exclaimed, "Where have ye laid him?" How sweet is it also to weep at the feet of the Saviour, sweeter often than a direct consolation! The humiliation, contrition, and grief, the fruit of these tears, is something very lovely. But he hears the sighing of the needy, and sees their wretchedness. The broken and contrite heart the Lord will not despise; on the contrary, it is a sacrifice with which he is well pleased.

The *third* step is when the individual has wearied himself in his own ways, and striven in his own might to conquer sin, but has been continually overcome, notwithstanding the sincerity of his endeavours at amendment, and at length begins to find that there is salvation in no other than in Jesus, who is alone able to heal all his diseases. Then it is that he cries unto the Lord, saying, "O Lord, thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry, for I am brought very low. Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name!" (Ps. cxlii. 5. 7.)

The Lord Jesus does not leave the man in this condition, but reveals himself to him as full of grace and truth. He becomes a believer; and this is the *fourth* step towards climbing the hill Beautiful. He feels divinely assured that Jesus saves sinners, and thus finds rest. His sinfulness torments him no longer, although it humbles him; but at the same time, it urges him to cleave the more closely to Jesus. And what is more beautiful than such a believing and confident heart, which trusts entirely in God through Christ, like a dear child in its beloved father, and is no longer anxious either on account of the sins committed in ignorance, because Christ has washed them away; or on account of inherent corruption, which is covered by the sufferings and death of Christ, until entirely removed; or on account of his spiritual enemies, since he can do all things through Christ strengthening him; or on account of manifold afflictions, for he who imposes the burden also helps to bear it; or on account of his enduring to the end; for "faithful is he that hath called us, who also will do it." The fruit now appears of itself, which no previous effort, however painful, could produce. All is now fair and beautiful, and the soul encamps at Mount Sapher.

Here it is that God clothes such souls with the robes of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with his ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels; so that they rejoice in the Lord, and are joyful in their God. They forget their kindred and their father's house, and the king takes pleasure in their beauty; for they are "all

glorious within, their raiment is of wrought gold." And thus at length shall they be presented before the Father's face with exceeding joy, when fully restored to his image, and when every spot and wrinkle is for ever washed away.

XXXIV.

HARADAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 24.

“ And they removed from Mount Shapher, and encamped in Haradah.”

THIS twentieth encampment is called Haradah, and lies, of all others, the nearest to Egypt. Its name has an evil signification, for it means *terror*. But how singular! The last encampment was on Mount Beautiful, and the very next is called “terror!” But are such things really experienced in the kingdom of God? Is there such a guidance as this? They are near Egypt. We find the Psalmist saying, “I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer thy terrors I am distracted. Thy fierce wrath goeth over me, thy terrors have cut me off;” and Job, “The arrows of the Almighty are within me, the poison whereof drinketh up my spirit; the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me.” Dreadful expressions! Thus we see that the compass of the Christian’s vessel is sometimes directed towards the

pit, even as that of the reprobate occasionally towards heaven.

Haradah is the outermost point of their retrograde movement. There the elect, holy, and beloved people present the most wretched appearance. They are like Christ at the lowest degree of his humiliation, full of sorrow, and “without form or comeliness.”

We find an explanation of this encampment in the words of Christ, (Isaiah l. 10.) “Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light—let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.”

In these words, the Christian is presented to our view in his first estate. We here see a believer, whose mind has been irradiated by the rays of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and into whose heart God has shone. His joy at this was so great, that his heart separated itself from every thing of a perishable nature, and resolved in future to venture every thing, in order to seek his happiness solely in the light of the divine countenance, the purposely offending of which is as dreadful to him as hell itself; hence he seeks with all earnestness to obey the voice of the Lord’s servant. Judge yourselves, whether, with the exception of eternal damnation, any thing more severe can befall him, than when the crevice through which the light shone into him, is completely closed, the refreshing beams of the divine countenance withdrawn from him, the consciousness of the gifts of grace vouchsafed to him no longer felt, and every thing covered as with a gloomy cloud, so that he walks in darkness and has no light. Add to this, that his soul

is assailed by the dreadful hosts of hell, and overtaken by the terrors of the Almighty, so that thus deprived of all light, he is tempted by the tormenting supposition, that God is not his covenant God, nor Jesus his Mediator, and will never be so. All that he had hitherto possessed, experienced, enjoyed, believed, and hoped, was probably nothing but a mere illusion; his supposed state of grace, a dreadful self-deception; his prayer, sin; and his final portion, the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, since he feels that he is cast out from the presence of God.* Judge, therefore, what a dreadful station Haradah must be, where, though not all, but yet some, though not in the same degree, or for the same length of time, must encamp, and that too, after being on Mount Shapher, and beholding Canaan from its heights. Such is the meaning of the words, “walking in darkness.”

But what is there that may in any measure serve the individual in such a forlorn and desolate state, as a support and a stay? One thing alone, and this our Redeemer mentions in the passage we have quoted; “let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.” The name of God, which he himself proclaimed as merciful, gracious, long suffering, and of great goodness and truth; and the name of Christ, who is called “the Lord our righteousness,” both form a rod and staff to the devout Christian, thus walking in darkness, which he must grasp with the hand of naked faith, in order safely to stay himself upon them.

* This stage of christian experience is aptly represented by Bunyan, in the passage of his pilgrim through the valley of the shadow of death.

This is the only, but at the same time, the sufficient support in his trying situation ; until at length the Lord causes his face again to shine, and dispels the darkness.

These words of the prophet indicate generally, that one who sincerely fears the Lord, and obeys the voice of his servant, may continue walking in darkness and without light for hours, days, or years ; and that some really enter into such a state, but are at length happily delivered from it.

But what is the state in which the devout Christian feels himself placed, when thus walking in darkness, and being deprived of light ? By means of light, every thing becomes obvious to the sense of sight. Light, sight, and faith, are distinguished from each other in Scripture ; and faith is described as a not doubting of that which is not seen. “ We walk by faith, and not by sight.” “ Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” When it is said of the believer that he has no light, the meaning is not that he does not know himself and his own wretchedness ; for upon this very part of his inward world, the light has clearly arisen ; but it means, he is, at the time, devoid of all sensible consciousness that God loves him, and is gracious to him for the sake of Christ.

God frequently and commonly assists the believer with a three-fold light. First, the immediate light of his countenance, respecting which it is said, “ Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved.” “ They shall walk, O Lord ! in the light of thy countenance.” This is the sealing of the Spirit, by which the soul is firmly assured of its being in a state of grace, and that it will

abide in it for ever. If this pleasing light be withdrawn, the soul walks in darkness, because the Lord hides his face from her. This hiding of God's countenance our Lord himself experienced on the cross, when he exclaimed, "Why hast thou forsaken me!"

But can such a procedure consist with the love of God? Certainly it may; for in the passage we have quoted, he calls himself *his* God, who has no light. "In a little wrath," it is said, in chap. liv. 8, "I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee." God acts as a father, who though he severely chastises his son, and even forbids him to present himself before him, yet does not cease for a moment to be his father; and if others sought to assist in ill treating his son, he would soon take his son's part against them; and when our heavenly Father deprives his children of their spiritual comforts, yet his sanctifying, preserving, and invigorating influences continue, by which they are spurred on to the attainment of a godliness, which is so much the purer the less it is accompanied by any consolation; even as Christ accomplished his most perfect obedience at a time when he was forsaken of God. A soul which, in a state of spiritual abandonment, still cleaves firmly to God, whom it neither sees nor feels, is more pleasing in his sight than one which does so in the enjoyment of great inward felicity.

God, secondly, supports faith by the consciousness of his gracious gifts in the soul. The individual feels that he sincerely hates sin, and loves holiness; that he delights in the law of God after the inner man; that he loves Jesus and all his followers; he perceives an

increase of the fruits of the Spirit within him, and hence infers, that he is an heir of heaven. But the soul may be deprived of this light, so that the man's looks are directed solely to his own heart, as divested of all that is good. Thus the church complains, "Why dost thou harden our hearts from thy fear?"

The Lord commonly assists faith by the light of his word of promise. If the believer does not enjoy any direct comfort and consolation, he may nevertheless have such a believing insight into the divine promises, which in Christ Jesus are yea and amen, as willingly to bear the being deprived of those feelings, since the latter is of a more permanent nature.

But when the individual thus walks in darkness, he knows not whither he goeth, according to the words of our Lord, (John xii. 35,) "He stumbles at every step." Hence Isaiah says, (chap. lix. 9, 10,) "We wait for the light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness. We grope for the wall like the blind. We stumble at noon-day as in the night." Every thing we hear, and whatever befalls us then dispirits us. "Ah," we think, "such a glory indeed exists; but not for us." The man then stumbles at single and difficult passages of Scripture, and at the dealings of Providence, or even misinterprets the most consolatory parts of the Word of God to his prejudice, and refuses to be comforted.

Walking in darkness easily causes terror, and affords the imagination opportunity of creating a variety of terrific phantoms where nothing exists, and of magnifying what is real. Horror and great darkness are said to have fallen upon Abraham at the same time (Gen.

xv. 12.); and Heman complains, that "whilst suffering the terrors of God, he was distracted." (Psalm lxxxviii. 15.)

In such a mournful condition may the true children of God be placed, and continue in it for a time, nay, even for a long time, so that "their life draweth near to the pit," according to David's expression. The causes of this mournful state are three: the Spirit of God, the human heart and physical reasons, and the prince of darkness, all which operate certainly from very different motives.

The Christian, who has been accustomed to draw water with joy out of the wells of salvation, and to enjoy the comfort of the Holy Spirit, the true and only real comforter, taking of the things of Christ and showing them to the soul, enlightening the mind into the knowledge of the truth, applying the promises, and bearing witness with his Spirit, that he is a child of God; when all this is for a time taken from him, experiences its total reverse; tribulation instead of comfort; darkness instead of light; doubt and dismay instead of certainty and assurance. And yet this is one of his modes of teaching; it is, that a deeper foundation may be dug for the impartation of the divine virtues, and that after such severe lessons, the individual may listen the more attentively to his dictates, and yield himself up the more exclusively to his influences.

Another source of darkness is our natural constitution. There are diseases of the body which at the same time oppress the mind, by producing in it dejection, apprehension, and painful feelings. A stoppage in the regular circulation of the juices may produce

dreadful depressions, which cease as soon as regularity is restored to the system, with which a long list of gloomy forebodings disappears. Such sufferers are generally looked upon and treated as only imaginary patients, especially since they are not themselves able to say what is the matter with them, and yet they are deserving of great and tender compassion. It is bad enough to be deprived of almost every joyful feeling, and that every thing envelopes itself in thick darkness to their view; so that they who were formerly so cheerful, are now the most sorrowful. How hard it is, therefore, when they are even reproached for their sufferings, and things authoritatively demanded of them which are out of their power to perform! These sufferings are met with not only in converted, but also in unconverted persons. We are not speaking here of the latter, but of those who "fear the Lord, and obey the voice of his servant." If amongst them there are those who walk in darkness and have no light, a great part of their sufferings may arise from physical causes, and will cease with the latter. It is not without reason, therefore, that our clayey tenements are called "vile bodies," in which we groan, being burdened. There are doubtless many believing individuals who lie upon this secret rack, and seldom enjoy a pleasant hour. Yet not a hair falls from their heads without the will of their Father in heaven. This secret suffering must also work together for good. Its endurance is difficult, but important.

But it is not to be wondered at that our own hearts increase the darkness and distress, when the Lord conceals his face, and when instead of hoping the best from him, they only expect the worst, because of the weak-

ness of our natures. Yet not merely because we are weak, but also sinful creatures, does darkness naturally dwell in us ; so that before regeneration, we are nothing but darkness. But even as God caused the light to shine out of the darkness, so has he also shone into our hearts. And we retain this clear light only as long as God permits it to shine. If he withdraws it from us, our natural darkness returns, from whence various torments arise, like a smoke which envelopes the surface of the inward world, and hence also the heart forms incorrect judgments, even of the very passages of Scripture which ought to be a consolation to it. Suspicion and mistrust succeed to confidence and faith, and there is no end to the surmisings of evil.

But believers have by no means to struggle here solely with flesh and blood, although this strife alone exceeds all their natural powers. They have also to wrestle against the wily assaults of the devil and spiritual wickedness in high places. Satan "goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." His element is darkness, and when he sees the soul thus deprived of divine light, he avails himself of it as the most suitable period completely to destroy the poor and comfortless soul, to extinguish the last sparks of hope, and to tread down its life to the ground. He is ever ready with his evil insinuations, and tries as much as he dare, to shake the foundation of the divine word, and even the belief in the existence of God himself. He is continually seeking to do us all the injury in his power, and in Job we have an instance to what extent this may be carried, when by divine permission any one is suffered to fall into his hands.

Let us now make a few remarks upon the reasons

why the Lord thus suffers some of those who fear him and obey the voice of his servant, to walk in darkness, and have no light. We must, however, premise, that God's ways are unsearchable, and that he does as he pleases in heaven and on earth. But we have the assurance that he does not willingly grieve the children of men, "not for his pleasure, but for our profit, that we may become partakers of his holiness." Tribulation, prayer, and meditation were Luther's teachers, and he was wont to say, "My afflictions have taught me this." Painful trials also frequently follow distinguished consolations. Thus Paul, after having been caught up to the third heaven, was buffeted by Satan, and Christ himself was led from Jordan into the wilderness. Sometimes also they precede these consolations. Thus Paul says, "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."

But God does not lead all his people alike, nor make for himself any certain rule of guidance. Yet still this darkness is wont to overtake a child of God, after he has fallen into any gross sin; or after leading, on the whole, a slothful, worldly-minded, earthly, and frivolous course of life; and when he even thinks lightly of it, and will not suffer himself to be reproved for it; God then in the end acts the more severely with him, and treats him as described in Psalm l.: "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes."

Darkness is wont to befall a child of God also on account of trusting in an arm of flesh, however spiritual the confidence may appear to be. If we fall upon the idea, that our comforts and the gifts of grace

are so firmly established in us, and that we have received them of the Lord as a permanent possession, so that we can do with them as we please, and with regard to their preservation, increase, and exercise, do not consult with him; he then generally deprives us of this light, that we may learn to abide by the true source, and assume nothing as our own. Therefore never be proud, nor exalt thyself, but be humble, and think meanly of thyself, lest God should so deal with thee as to make thee regard thyself as "a worm and no man."

In conclusion, we have still to make a few remarks on the purposes of God towards his children, in bringing them into such painful situations. They are a powerful means of humbling them. We must not boast, either of natural or of spiritual gifts, but be like an empty vessel, into which every thing must be put, or even like a broken vessel, which cannot hold itself together. Self-confidence then entirely departs, and help is alone sought for in the name of "the Lord, who made heaven and earth." The individual feels compelled to renounce his own life, that Christ may be his life and his all. God alone is then regarded as wise, great, and holy, and becomes all in all; and is not this an important, nay, the final and supreme object of God?

Further, these inward sufferings are intended to produce a conformity between the soul and Christ. If there is a suffering for Christ's sake, there are also Christ's own sufferings; and he not unfrequently makes the soul a partaker of both; "fightings without, and fears within," by which Christ's soul was also assailed; on which account it is said of him, "He was heard in that he feared." (Heb. v. 7.) His soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. If Christ therefore

suffered both inwardly and outwardly, some are also called to be baptized with the same baptism, and to drink of the same cup. The honour is great. We thus learn in a measure to understand what Christ has suffered for us; and we shall be raised to partake of his glory, if we suffer with him. The latter is a pledge of the former, and the glory will be so much the greater, the more profound the sufferings that preceded it.

Remember also the great difference between the present state and the next, between earth and heaven, and accommodate thyself to every thing. Although it be true, that the Lord is present with his people, even to the end of the world, yet it is not the case as respects enjoyment, but only to faith. Here is not the time to be satisfied with his likeness, and to see him face to face. Bear the intervening clouds; there shall be no more in yonder world to hide his face from thy view.

This befalls thee also to exercise thee in patient expectation. "For ye have need of patience that ye may do the will of God and receive the promise." Though he tarry, wait for him; for "he will certainly come, and will not tarry." "We count them happy that endure." God himself is called the God of patience, and therefore account the long suffering of God as salvation.

Such a situation teaches us to place an uncommonly high value on God, his aid, grace, and consolation. Such is the case also in natural things. Privation first teaches the value of what we lightly esteemed, whilst possessing it. And O how precious are the crumbs that fall from the Master's table to the souls that look upon themselves only as hungry dogs! A person may

be so poor as to receive even a farthing with thankfulness, and so wretched, that a single gleam of hope refreshes him.

The paths of affliction are also a proper school for learning and exercising prayer. It is true that at such times the spirit of prayer seems to have departed from the poor soul, though it be not the case; although in its distress it is seldom able to give vent to its sorrows in a copious prayer, yet the unutterable groans are so much the more frequent.

How compassionate do they also become towards others in distress, who have themselves been bruised in this mortar, even as our Lord by his sufferings has become a compassionate High Priest, who can have compassion on our weakness. The reason why Job's friends were so harsh with him, was because they had never suffered. Those that are in health, know not the feelings of the sick; nor he who has never been in want, the sufferings of the poor. But it is the will of God, that we put on bowels of compassion, and he teaches us to do so by our own experience.

Finally, the Lord by this binding, slaying, and causing his people to pass through the fire, prepares a more excellent and perfect thank-offering. If he regards the lowliness of such a servant, his soul magnifies the Lord in an especial manner. Incense must first feel the effect of the fire; it then yields its fragrant perfume. Thanks are never more fervently, reverentially, sacredly, and blissfully rendered than from an entirely broken and contrite heart, which the Lord again comforts. And those that come out of great tribulation, shall at length experience, that their light afflictions, which are comparatively but momentary, shall work out

for them a far more abundant and exceeding weight of glory.

Be patient therefore, brethren, till the full measure of tears is shed. In the midst of darkness stay yourselves upon your God. This is no easy matter, but something surpassing all the powers of nature. But the Lord dwells in this darkness, although he seem to be at a distance. However gloomy every thing appears around you, do not give yourselves up to unbelief. Say with Job, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." The Lord, who has suffered darkness to surround you, will in due time shine into your hearts, and cause the light to arise upon them that dwell on the borders of the pit. "Cause thy face to shine, and we shall be saved." Amen.

XXXV.

MAKHELOTH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 25.

“ And they removed from Haradah, and pitched in Makheloth.”

AT length we depart from the painfully instructive Haradah. How long the Israelites remained there is uncertain. But as there are about as many years as encampments, it is not improbable that they were about a year at each place. They removed from Haradah—a desirable removal for the soul, even in this life, to be delivered from terror and from judgment. God in due time lifts up those whom his hand has abased.

Let us, first, consider the path by which the Israelites were led by the fiery and cloudy pillar. From Mount Shapher they removed to Haradah, and now return almost by the same route, leaving Shapher, however, a little to the left. They, therefore, go twice over the same track. Here the words of David occur to us; “God hath spoken once, twice have I heard this,”—and what was it?—“that power belongeth

exclusively unto God." True Christians are compared to gold, which, the oftener it is put into the crucible, the more refined it becomes, whilst at the same time the heat is increased.

We may suppose that we are acquainted with human corruption in its length and breadth, whilst we have perhaps only moistened our lips at this cup, and will subsequently have to learn much more of it. We may also believe that we are able to see to the very bottom of the gospel, and yet, later on, obtain a much more astonishing insight into it. Certain it is, however, that the Christian must travel the same path more than once; and it is highly beneficial to him, when the way between his heart and Christ is so diligently trodden by him, that not a single weed of self-righteousness or the love of the world can grow in it.

There are ways, which we are unwilling to travel twice; and others, in which we exclaim, "It is good to be here; let us build tabernacles." The Lord our God also enjoins us to remember all the way by which we have been led, and how he humbled us, in order afterwards to do us good. If the retrospect is humbling, by reason of our many failings, yet it tends to excite our diligence and thankfulness for so many faithful proofs of the Lord's aid and deliverance, and to induce us to resign ourselves anew to his wonderful and gracious guidance, and to confide in his further assistance.

How did the children of Israel rejoice in having at length turned their backs upon Egypt, and on being permitted again to set their faces towards Canaan! They had no longer any desire to go down to Egypt;

hence it was, that God could venture to lead them so near to it. He is well aware how far he can trust his people. He prepares them, previous to putting them to the test. Nor does he suffer them to be tempted above what they are able to bear. The children of God are only suffered to be enticed to sin, when the Holy Spirit has wrought in them a sacred abhorrence of it, and a delight in the law of God. Israel is only then led near to Egypt, when he had no longer any desire to go thither.

The people now thought they would return in a straight line to Canaan, where they might easily arrive in a few days. But their expectations were disappointed, for their route deviated to the left. It is not good to venture on establishing the way and manner, time and method of the fulfilment of the divine prophecies or promises. For we generally grossly miscalculate, and the result is very different to what we expected. God fulfils, both but in his own way. For instance, he has promised to sanctify his people, but he acts generally very strangely in this respect. "Our nature," says an experienced saint, "knows no other way of being perfect, than by seeking to become something. But God's way is very different. He brings to nought that which is, that he may be all in all." The grain of wheat must corrupt in the ground, else it abideth alone. The Lord fulfils his promise, and what he says, he performs. He brings Israel to Canaan, however circuitous the path, and though it lead even down to the Red Sea.

Faith stands connected, not only with an entire denial of self and every creature, but also with an entire resignation to God. Not only faith, but patience

also is declared to be indispensable in order to receive the promise, and Peter connects waiting with hastening.

The twenty-first encampment of the Israelites bears the name of Makheloth. This word has the same signification with Kehelathah, and we have therefore little to add to our previous remarks. In the twenty-second and fortieth Psalms, the Messiah is introduced, saying, "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation;" and again, "My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation." Here we see what ought to be the occupation of those that thus assemble together—the praise of God, and the preaching of his righteousness, particularly that righteousness, which magnified itself in the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ, and which he has wrought out for us, which is from faith to faith, even as it is written, "the just shall live by faith." He is the well of salvation, from which his people quench their thirst, and supply all their wants, in which all their salvation rests, and to which all are invited. And what else shall a poor sinner praise, than the bleeding merits of Christ, without which spotless robe, not a thread remains by which he can cover his nakedness, and venture to appear before God? Where this article is not preached, there is no assembling together, but a scattering; for he that gathereth not with Christ, scattereth.

Although, in reality, there is but one assembly and church, of which Christ is the head, yet it is mentioned in the plural number, because of its two great divisions, the one of which is in heaven, and the other on earth; and also because of the difference that exists in the children of God, in knowledge, experience, and gifts,

there being children, young men, and fathers. Notwithstanding the unity, there is a great difference, and thus they assemble together in single congregations; those which most resemble each other stand the closest together, understand each other best, and by a secret attraction are brought near each other. Thus, besides universal love, there is a particular love, rendered sacred by the example of Christ himself. He had a particular affection for John, and formed an alliance between him and his mother, whilst at the same time he commanded all his disciples to love one another. David had his Jonathan, and Paul his Timothy, who also assures us that "he had no one like-minded." But by this, those divisions are by no means defended, in which one says, "I am of Paul," another, "I am of Apollos," a third, "I am of Cephas." These are not gatherings together, but scatterings.

Christ calls his church, in the Psalm above quoted, "the great congregation." He does so because of the number of its members, who eventually, when all shall be collected together, shall constitute an immense multitude which no man can number. They enjoy great honour; for they that receive Christ, obtain power to become the children of God. Great are the blessings provided for them and reserved for their possession! Great is their righteousness, for it is the righteousness of God; and great is their strength, for they are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might!

The word congregating or gathering together, has, in Scripture, a pleasing signification. Thus it is said in Isaiah liv. 7. "With great mercies will I gather thee;" and in chap. lvi. 8. "The Lord God which gathereth the outcasts of Israel, saith, "Yet will I

gather others to him, besides those that are gathered unto him;" and Christ says, "How often would I have gathered thee, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings."

We have been at Haradah, that is, in terror. Here at Makheloth we enjoy a flowing together of holy influences and impartations, for refreshment, invigoration, and consolation. If the heart was rent there, it is healed here; if every one, as Christ said of his disciples, was scattered to his own, here they are re-assembled in one point of union, in which every blessing is concentrated; if we were distressed there, we are here comforted. As sunshine is never more lovely than after long continued rain, and rain is never more welcome than after a long season of drought, so divine influences are never more beneficial, than after being long and painfully deprived of them. How pleasing it is that in the journeyings of the children of God, a Makheloth follows upon a Haradah!

"It is a faithful saying, that if we die with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him; but if we deny him, he will also deny us. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself." (2 Tim. ii. 11.) The most mournful Psalms mostly close in the most pleasing manner, and the sweetest praise resounds after deliverance from great distress. In what a Haradah were the disciples placed at the death of their Lord; but how did they rejoice, when able to say, "The Lord is risen indeed." Paul had great cause for desiring to be with Christ; but he was obliged to wait. So much the sweeter was therefore his final removal to be ever with him!

Earnestly strive, above all things, to become, not merely outwardly, but inwardly and really, a member of the great congregation, and thus really participate in its guidance and its blessings. If thou then change thy encampment, yet the pillar of fire and of cloud is thy safe and salutary guide, and though it may be difficult to be satisfied with all the leadings of providence, yet they are good, and bring thee ever nearer to Canaan.

XXXVI.

TAHATH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 26.

“And they removed from Makheloth, and encamped at Tahath.”

THIS is, therefore, that encampment, when the Israelites crossed the path they had previously travelled. It approaches towards Canaan, and lies almost parallel with it. This twenty-second encampment is called “Tahath,” which signifies ‘for,’ ‘instead of;’ one of the most distinguishing and important words in christian doctrine, on which much—nay, every thing depends. He who duly apprehends its great and weighty meaning, who revolves it in his heart, digests, and, as it were, infuses it into his flesh and blood, in his inmost parts, has found an encampment, where he finds full security and rest for his soul.

The word has reference to representation, or legal exchange, in which one man occupies and is placed in the stead of another; where one man acts and suffers in legal and other transactions, in the place of another, in his name, and for his benefit—acts, by

performing that, which otherwise he ought to have done, whose representative he has become ; or suffers, by enduring that, which otherwise the former ought to have suffered. Thus, an advocate appears in court in behalf of an accused person, and pleads instead of him, and in his name ; a guardian conducts a lawsuit in the stead of his minor ; one person becomes surety for another, by undertaking the payment of his debts, or pledges himself and his property for his good conduct, and by this means procures liberty and ease for the latter. As soon as any one becomes the representative of another, his actions and services are no longer regarded as his own, nor ascribed to him, except in so far as it is thereby evident that he fulfils the obligations of his vicarious character. On the contrary, that which he performs is placed to the account of him in whose name he acts. The latter has all the benefit arising from it, and the former only the honour and the praise. Thus, an ambassador treats in the name of his sovereign with some other monarch. His ability in the execution of his office brings him honour, but the results do not personally affect him. This species of interference is also called mediation, and he who undertakes it, a mediator.

It is easy to perceive, that all are not suitable for representatives and mediators. No one can be compelled to undertake this office, unless it lay in the nature of the thing. He must possess the requisite qualifications. He that becomes surety for another's debts, must possess property ; he who gives security for another's good conduct, must himself be blameless. If any one wishes to be a mediator, he must be at least of equal rank with the parties he desires to reconcile.

If the affair be intricate, he must possess all possible prudence ; if difficult, perseverance ; if painful, steadfastness and patience ; if of great magnitude, he must possess the requisite power and ability. He must also be duly authorized ; for he that would interfere as mediator unbidden, might easily come off the worse for it. In natural things, of which we are now speaking, suretyship has its limits. The one cannot suffer death for the other. This is not permitted by any law, either human or divine.

It is sufficiently obvious, how uncommonly advantageous such a representation must be for any one, in whose behalf it is undertaken. By it, he is divested of all vexation, care, and responsibility, which are transferred to his representative.

Hitherto we have only spoken in general terms of this matter. But in the kingdom of God there is also a suretyship, which is of supreme importance and unspeakable benefit ; there is a Tahath, a ' for,' and ' instead of,' from whence our whole salvation depends. This suretyship was pointed out even in Paradise. Our great progenitor was told, that the day in which he ate of the fruit of the tree, he should surely die. He did not, however, die, but in his stead, a clean beast, and he was clothed with its skin ; but he was then dismissed from Paradise. The sacrifices of the Old Testament dispensation are nothing else than vicarious. The priests bear the people's sins. They lay them on the head of the sacrificial lamb. They slay the innocent animal instead of the guilty, and thus atonement is made. At length an individual appears, who is holy, innocent, and separate from sinners, higher than the heavens, and anointed with the Holy Spirit without measure. A

prophet pointing to him, exclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!" One of the most singular circumstances in the life of this incomparable individual, is the public testimony of the judge who condemned him to death, that he found no fault in him, and must therefore set him at liberty. At the same time he is coupled with a heinous malefactor, and the question is asked, "Which of the two shall be released, and which shall be executed?" The decision is given in favour of the criminal, who is set at liberty, but the innocent condemned to that punishment which ought to have been inflicted on the former, and would have been so, had not this exchange rescued him.

Let us now consider the matter a little more closely. The cause of this suretyship and mediation, lies in a circumstance in itself extremely deplorable and abhorrent; and that is sin—that worst of all evils, that parent of all unhappiness and abomination, which cannot be sufficiently abhorred, hated, and avoided! It is the enemy of God, and were it as strong as it is malicious, it would have cast down God himself from his throne, annihilated and condemned him, and destroyed all his works. But fortunately, though potent, it is not omnipotent nor invincible. It is enmity against God, and is opposed to him in every respect—to all his commandments, intentions, and purposes, as far as its power extends. It is darkness, and would, if it were able, entirely extinguish the light of truth and holiness. It is utter disorder, discord, and contradiction, and can only ruin and destroy, and produce nothing but misery.

This monster has entered into the world, and has

caused horrible devastations in the visible and invisible creation, and particularly in the latter, where it infected an exalted, mighty, highly gifted spirit, and thus gained a powerful support for itself. Sin is unrighteousness, and being once in the world, God could not suffer it to pass unpunished, but was necessitated to manifest his righteousness, his sentiments respecting it, his infinite abhorrence of it, punish it, and give it its due reward, which is death. Hence all that bore the name of sinner must necessarily perish, or else a 'Tahath,' a for and instead of, a representative, surety, and mediator must be found, by whose means a sinful world might be pardoned and blessed, without divine justice and holiness being obscured by it. Herein lies the necessity of a mediator by which the things might be performed which pertained to God, and reconciliation be made for our sins.

The origin and source of mediation does not lie in man's repentance, but merely in divine compassion, free grace, and preventing love. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us," in such a measure, as not to spare his only begotten Son, but gave him up as a propitiation for our sins, to redeem them that were under the law; made him to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him; made him a curse, that we might inherit the blessing; gave him up to die, that we might live; and made him a servant, that we might receive the adoption of children.

We know the Mediator. It was Christ who was slain for us. He unites in his person all the qualities and perfections which are requisite for the mediatorial office; for "there is one God, and one Mediator be-

tween God and man, the man Christ Jesus." On the one side, so nearly related to God as a son to a father, so much so, that both are one; he being in the Father and the Father in him; he, therefore, possesses all the wisdom and glory, the power, love, and holiness, and all the riches and courage which are requisite for such an arduous undertaking. On the other side, he is so nearly related to us, that he is called the Son of man; has become a partaker of our flesh and blood; and thus both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified are all of one; therefore, that which he does and suffers, benefits the race in whose nature he accomplishes it; for "here is Immanuel"—that is, "God with us." He did not glorify himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. Hence the pleasure of the Lord prospers in his hand, and by his knowledge many shall be made righteous. Such a high priest was requisite for us; and such a one we have, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens.

He undertook his mediatorship even before the world was, and in the fulness of time accomplished it in all its extent, and the Scriptures speak of its results and effects in an astonishing manner. Voluntarily and impelled by love, he placed himself in such a situation as to be capable of suffering and obedience, and as he required not the fruit of this for himself, he bestowed it on others. He gradually accomplished his mediation, from its commencement on earth, till its completion in heaven. The Word was made flesh, and O the great mystery of godliness! God was manifested in it. Satan used every artifice and all his power to overcome him.

Men raged against him, and nailed him to the cross. God himself forsook him, and thus increased his sufferings to the highest degree. At length he died, as one accursed of God and man, and as sin itself.

But why was all this? For us! For us he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Our old man was crucified in his person, and hence faith says, "I am crucified with Christ." Our old man was slain in his person, and hence faith triumphantly exclaims, "If one died for all, then are all dead." But he that is dead, is freed from sin. And to believers it is said, "Ye are dead." But the suretyship did not end even here. "Ye are risen with Christ, through faith, which is of the operation of God." Nor did this suffice, but he has also ascended up to heaven for us; where we have him, not only as an intercessor, but are even made to sit together with him in heavenly places.

But who is able fully to express the blessings resulting from this Tahath—this mediation? It is of equal magnitude and excellency, whether we regard the evil from which it delivers us, or the good we receive by its means, through faith. Happy, therefore, are they who are justified in saying, "He took our place; he rendered satisfaction in our stead!" Happy are they who have him for their surety; and even all those are happy who become conscious how indispensable such a Mediator is, and who thirst and pant after him, as the hart for the water-brooks, and to whom it is promised, that water from this living spring shall be given to them freely.

But he that has duly penetrated into this element by faith, and lives in it—who, under the guidance of the

fiery and cloudy pillar, is encamped at Tahath, has there found a glorious resting place, that does not suffer him to be barren or unfruitful. A tree planted by these water-brooks, brings forth its peaceable fruit in patience, and its leaves do not fade.

May the Lord, the Holy Spirit, exalt Christ *for* us in our hearts ; Christ *in* us will then be the hope of our glory. Amen.

XXXVII.

TARAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 27.

“ And they departed from Tahath, and pitched at Tarah.”

TARAH is the twenty-third encampment. Two different meanings are given to the word, but both are very suitable to succeed the previous place of encampment. If deduced from a language nearly allied to the Hebrew, it indicates a staying or abiding, but otherwise a blowing of the wind or spirit, and the refreshing feeling occasioned by it. It will already be apparent to every one how admirably this adapts itself to what has preceded it. Let us therefore now consider a little more minutely the two meanings of the name of this encampment.

Its first signification implies a staying or abiding. John informs us, that there stood by the cross of Christ, his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, Mary Magdalen, and the disciple whom Jesus loved. A station worthy of imitation in every age. Let us, therefore, contemplate the mediation

accomplished on the cross, and linger there, with a considerate understanding, believing mind, loving heart, and a prayerful soul.

First, therefore, with a *considerate understanding*. What a multitude of the most important objects present themselves to our minds! This is the centre of the ways of God, the key and marrow of the word. We see here the greatness of the divine holiness and justice, which lays in the dust of death the Son of God, made sin for us. Here they appear in unparalleled splendour. Though the flood swept away all that had breath from the face of the earth, and even the suckling at its mother's breast—yet these were only human beings who had become monsters in wickedness, or would have grown up as such. Fire from heaven destroyed Sodom and all its inhabitants; but these, like the former, were wicked men. The earth opened, and swallowed up Korah and his rebellious adherents; but the same may be said of them. But who is this, that writhes under the scourges of Pilate or rather of the divine wrath, whose agony presses out drops of blood? Who is it that expires amidst excruciating torments? whom God forsakes? It is a holy man, and at the same time God's own Son, the representative of our sinful race. What justice is here displayed! If it had been possible that the cup could have passed from him, it would have done so.

The magnitude and abominable nature of sin appears at the cross in all its blackness. Is this sin? Is this its reward? Is this the manifestation of the righteousness of God with respect to it? Must God's own Son be put to death because he was found in fashion as a man, and numbered amongst the transgressors? What

then would become of us out of Christ? If God spared not his own Son, how much less will he spare us, if we do not walk in his ways nor keep his statutes!

The wonderful means of deliverance here presents itself to our understanding for devout meditation, which is designated in the remarkable words, "He that knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us." God here appears in a way never heard of before, as one who justifieth the ungodly—a mystery which had never entered into any human heart, and against which all reason rebels. "By his stripes we are healed." By his death we receive life—by his condemnation, absolution. Who can fathom it? Linger here, O my soul, with thy meditations! Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! Look how he was bruised for our iniquities!

Linger with thy thoughts on the unsearchable love of God, which manifests itself here in the giving up of his beloved Son, in executing justice upon him, and in the bearing of a load which he alone was able to sustain. Who manifests here the greatest love—the Father who gives up his Son, or the Son who yields up himself? The Father commendeth his love towards us, that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. The Son commendeth his love towards us, as a love which cannot be equalled, in laying down his life. Oh that we might be able to say with John, "We have believed and known the love which God hath towards us," that thus we might be perfect in love which driveth out all fear! "Continue ye in my love!" Here linger with thy meditation, so as to desire to know nothing, save Jesus

Christ and him crucified, by whom the world is crucified to thee, and thou to the world.

We ought not only to dwell with a considerate understanding on the sacrifice which Christ offered on the cross for us, but also with a *believing mind*. This presupposes a penitential feeling, and cannot exist without it. If thou lovest the world, and takest pleasure in the service of sin, how is it possible for thee to believe in Christ, who came to destroy the works of the devil, which thou art seeking to uphold? Perhaps thou thinkest thou art upright, confidest in the correctness of thy views, and the capacity of thy understanding, and imaginest that thou possessest the requisite strength and ability for that which is good. Supposing thyself thus rich—how canst thou believe in Christ? Are not the rich ashamed to beg? How wilt thou be able to believe on him, so long as thou dost not regard thyself as poor and wretched, and blind and naked? Dwell here with a penitent mind, shed floods of the bitterest tears at the foot of the cross, whilst considering thyself as having nailed him to it by thy sins, and caused him thus to suffer. Abhor thyself on account of thy sins, and on account of the sinfulness which still daily manifests itself in thee; judge and condemn thyself. Acknowledge thy guilt, and confess, with sincerity of heart, that thou art a sinner.

But when thus possessed of a broken and contrite heart, abide by the cross with a believing mind, until thou canst say, "He loved me, and gave himself *for me*." Yea, linger there, till this great mystery is unfolded to thee; so that being purified from an evil conscience, thou mayest have access with boldness to the throne of grace.

But continue there also with a *loving heart*. Love him, who has first loved thee. And how great is his love! It is impossible for us to look into it, without having our hearts inflamed with ardent and reciprocal love. How blissful will it eventually be to be able to love him with all our powers; and how much it is to be lamented that our love here below is mostly so lukewarm! How much blindness and unbelief still exist in us, as to produce so cheerless a state! What a happiness it is that love does not consist so much in our love to him, as in his love to us!

Abide at the foot of the cross also with a *prayerful soul*. Who can receive any thing, unless it be given him from heaven? Who can, without him, do any thing? Can a branch bear fruit out of the vine? "Look unto the Lord, and ye shall be enlightened, and your faces shall not be ashamed." What is more capable of driving us to him, and inducing us to cleave to him, than either love, or else our misery and distress? To whom else shall we go? or how hope to escape from any distress? Let the language of Jacob therefore be the language of every heart, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me!"

But we must not omit to call to mind how he has engaged to abide by his people, since he has promised, saying, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world!" *ALWAY*, consequently both in good and evil days, like the sun, although not always seen. This is the hold which never fails us. What else could avail, since our enemies are so numerous, who would, in that case, easily destroy us. "If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us, when they had swallowed us up

quick," (Psalm cxxiv. 1—3.) But now we can rejoice and say, "The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."

It is, therefore, good to be at Tarah. If this interpretation of the word accords well with that of the previous encampment—its other meaning does so no less, being rendered by "the breath or wind of the Spirit," by "respiration and the refreshment derived from it." For from whence does the true vital air proceed, but from the cross of Christ? What causes us to respire more freely than this?

The refreshing breeze, and the free respiration arising from it, presupposes oppression and difficulty of breathing, whether arising from a thick and sultry atmosphere, or from a diseased state of the lungs. This is also applicable to spiritual things. The atmosphere of the region in which our souls dwell by nature is hot and oppressive. The devil has the power of the air, according to the singular expression of Paul, Ephes. ii. 2. He is, therefore, able so to corrupt the spiritual atmosphere, that it is difficult to breathe in it, or, in other words, he can cause all kinds of oppressive and distressing feelings.

It is also difficult to breathe in the atmosphere of Sinai, or the law. The law with all its works affords neither rest nor peace. Its discourse is excellent but terrific; for it preaches condemnation. It discovers sin, and pronounces the curse upon it. "We die!" exclaimed the children of Israel at Sinai.

The majesty and holiness of God acts likewise as an intolerable atmosphere to the sinner. The ungodly are unable to stand before it; and even a holy prophet exclaimed "Woe is me, for I am undone!" And why? Because "I am a man of unclean lips."

The state of primary repentance is also thus oppressive. Paul, whilst experiencing it, neither slept, ate, nor drank, but only wept, trembled, and quaked. O, how difficult is it then to draw a single breath of consolation, confidence, and hope!

The hour of temptation is likewise a state of similar oppression. The sun and the refreshing light then no longer shine upon the languishing soul. This state is called a furnace of affliction, a passing through the fire. And who can breathe freely in such an atmosphere? Their moisture is then consumed, as in the drought of summer.

The present encampment is delightfully opposed to such contracted and oppressive states, since it implies a refreshing breeze, and a free respiration—nay, even repose itself. How pleasing is it in outward things, when a cool breeze springs up after sultry weather! How gladly we yield ourselves up to it, and imbibe large draughts of it! How we feel invigorated by it, and animated through all our frame! And how comfortable does an invalid feel, who suffers from difficulty of respiration, when an attack of it is over! then it is, as if he were completely restored.

Something similar, but much more glorious, is experienced in the kingdom of God. There are many Tarahs on the wearisome way to Canaan. The Holy Spirit is the wind, the breath of life, and when the Lord breathes upon us, the face of our earth is renewed. (Psalm civ. 30.) The gloomy clouds disappear, and Tahath, the vicarious sacrifice of the cross, and the whole history of Christ, shines in its peculiar excellence and glory, so suitable and cheering to the humbled sinner.

This breath of heavenly air, this wind from Bethlehem, Golgotha, and the Mount of Olives, elevates the mourning penitent above the pangs of repentance, and shows him a fulness of salvation, which infinitely exceeds his necessities.

The peaceful gale from Salem, sets the assaulted soul again at liberty. Jesus says, "I am he;" and every fear-exciting phantom dissolves into nothing, and thankfulness and peace succeed. How does love, together with all the fruits of the Spirit, now manifest itself! How freely breathes the soul in the reception of all the promises, in the assurance of continual protection, in prayer, in thanksgiving, in intercession! If previously the individual could utter only painful and broken ejaculations, his heart now continually occupies itself with Jesus; and its prayer is enjoyment.

O precious Tarah! O pleasing blowing of the wind of the Spirit of Jesus Christ! "Awake O south wind, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out!" This is an unequalled refreshment. With fresh and cheerful courage we then proceed further, even though it be through barren deserts. We then meet sufferings boldly, and courageously handle our weapons, confiding in him whose name is "Yea and Amen."

O what will it be, when eventually that peaceful and tranquil gale shall for ever blow upon us; that gentle whisper breathe, in which is the Lord himself—when every obstruction and every thing of an oppressive nature shall for ever cease! May the wind of the Lord lift us up, and carry us into that land of peace, for the sake of Christ's vicarious sacrifice! Amen.

XXXVIII.

MITHCAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 28.

“ And they removed from Tarah, and pitched in Mithcah.”

THIS twenty-fourth encampment has also a pleasing name, which signifies *sweetness*. Truly a delightful encampment. Let us therefore consider something of the sweetness of the kingdom of God, its sources, and its nature.

The world imagines itself in the possession of those things which are able to afford pleasure and joy, and considers godliness as a thing destructive to, and utterly destitute of joy. This we by no means admit, but maintain, on the contrary, that godliness is the necessary condition of all true joy, and that the latter without the former, is mutable, insufficient, and impossible.

The world speaks much of allowable sensible pleasures. We admit their existence, but assert that their extent is carried far beyond the bounds of propriety and the limits of the word of God. “Flee,” it is said, “from the corruptible pleasures of the world.” “Love not the world, nor the things of the world, the lust of

the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. Whosoever loveth the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Nor do we wish to conceal the fact, that true godliness always begins with sorrow, and is continued under it in a variety of ways. Christ unceremoniously announces to them who wish to follow him, a daily cross, which they must take up. This cross crucifies and slays the love of the world. They that laugh are commanded to weep, their joy is to be turned into mourning, and their laughter into tears. And what is the joy there meant? Certainly not the joy of the Holy Ghost, which is a constituent part of the kingdom of God; consequently such joys as do not belong to it.

The source of godly joy does not lie in earthly things. Where true godliness exists, the latter have lost much of their value, and continue to do so. The being properly rooted and grounded in Christ, the being strengthened by his Spirit in the inner man, and having Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, is the aim after which the heart more and more ardently longs. However, we by no means say, that a truly godly man ought to regard every thing of an earthly nature with a melancholy look, and act according to such a feeling. O no! On the contrary, true godliness places the individual in a state in which he can be heartily glad of all these things, and delight himself in them in a manner that ungodly men are unable to do or to comprehend. They taste and see God himself in his creatures, and whichever way they turn, the image of their Heavenly Father presents itself to them.

They therefore enjoy divine delight, even in earthly things; but a man must be himself godly, in order to understand how widely different is this pleasure from

the earthly and carnal-mindedness with reference to the same object. The righteous alone are told to rejoice evermore ; and as long as an individual is not reconciled to God, he ought not to have a single happy moment.

But the true sources of the sweetness of the kingdom of God here upon earth lie,

First, in *the word of God*, of which the 119th Psalm justly says, when manifested, “ it rejoiceth the heart,” and David, in Psalm xix. says, that it was “ sweeter to him than honey or the honeycomb.” And from whence should we know that there is forgiveness with God, that he keeps mercy for thousands, that “ it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,” and that “ whosoever cometh unto him shall not be cast out ?” Whence should we know the other truths relating to salvation, on which the whole comfort of sinful men depends, but from the word of God ? O what an exquisite feast does the hungry soul frequently find prepared in the word : and how often do not even a few words of a sermon divest a soul of all its sorrows, and restore to it the peace of God ! What pleasing wonders has not frequently a verse of a hymn effected ! Therefore, as long as there is a Bible upon earth, the people of God have a Mithcah, a source of sweetness to soothe every sorrow.

Another of these sources lies, secondly, in the *communion of saints*, in the associating of Christians with one another. Christians have, even here below, in this respect, a taste of their eternal fellowship in heaven, and an experimental proof of the verification of the promise, “ Wherever two or three are met together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” An unspeak-

able blessing frequently rests upon social intercourse and the mutual intercession of believers, so that they say with Jacob, "The Lord is in this place," and their silence is often not less replete with unction than their converse. This sweetness is enjoyed particularly in places where Christians, on account of their small numbers, rarely meet.

Sweet to the true Christian is, thirdly, *pleasing intelligence concerning the extension of Christ's kingdom*, both generally and individually. Thus, when Paul and Barnabas came to Jerusalem, and told the church how much God had done by their means, and how he had opened the door of faith to the heathen, "they caused great joy unto all the brethren." (Acts xv. 3.) And is it not the case with us also, when we receive credible accounts of the progress of the truth in our own or distant countries? And when a single sinner repents, there is joy not only in heaven, but on earth also; and on such occasions it is meet to make merry and be glad, when he that was dead and lost, is found and alive again. The Lord grant us frequently this joy!

A fourth source of sweetness to the children of God arises from *remembrance*. "I call to remembrance the days of old," says David, and most believers have experienced remarkable events in their history, the remembrance of which causes them joy. This may arise either from a retrospect of all the way by which the Lord hath led us, and in which so many instances of his loving kindness and tender mercy have been experienced, or from the temporal favours and deliverances with which the Lord often causes his people's cup to overflow; so that they burst forth into accents of praise

and thanksgiving, saying with David, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits!"

The sacraments are a fifth source of sweetness to the Christian. The ground of faith which baptism presents to us, is perhaps too little attended to. In it, the triune God gives us the seal on our own bodies, that he is our God, and that all the three glorious persons in the ever blessed Trinity are willing to contribute to our salvation—that God is our Father, and is willing to provide for all our necessities, both of body and soul; that all that the Son has done and suffered shall belong to us; and that the Holy Spirit is willing to be our teacher, comforter, and renovator. Hence what a source of delightful contemplation ought this sacrament to afford us! Of the holy sacrament it is said, "And they broke bread from house to house, and did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." (Acts ii. 46.) and certainly, it is still frequently a pleasant bread and a reviving cup to believers. Whilst receiving the visible sign and seal, they feed upon the bread of life, Christ himself, and that frequently in an abundant measure.

A sixth especial source of sweetness flows to believers here below, from the *exercise of prayer*. O how indescribably sweet it is, to be permitted to converse in a filial and confidential manner with God as our gracious Father in Christ, and believingly pour out our complaints, desires, and whatever oppresses us, before him, in the confidence that the Lord will do for us more than we can ask or think! This sweetens every suffering, and in such intercourse of soul, the true Christian would gladly continue for hours together.

Seventhly, What sweetness there is in being *breathed*

upon by the *Holy Spirit*, and when by his animating breath, the fruits of the Spirit pleasingly manifest themselves! Spring, in nature, is something very delightful; in grace, still more so. Then, "beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." Then, the old man dare scarcely show himself, and the new predominates. We are then no longer in Marah, bitterness, but encamped in Mithcah, sweetness.

Eightly, But all this "oil of gladness," and this sweet honey, flows from *Christ*, the rock that follows us. Jesus can impart himself to the soul, and give us to enjoy him. This is the water of which he spoke to the Samaritan woman, and for which he incited her to ask. He that possesses and enjoys him, enjoys life itself. His flesh may be eaten in a spiritual manner, and his blood may be drunk. We may "taste and see that the Lord is good." This is heaven itself, and the heaven of heavens; and this made Asaph exclaim, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee!" and Paul considered all things but loss, for the excellence of this experimental knowledge of Christ.

O, if we rightly knew and believed that sweetness, joy, and delight are to be found alone and unadulterated in Christ, how would we hunger after him, and renounce all things for his sake! He that enjoys him, is certainly encamped in Mithcah, even though he were in the midst of a desert.

These are some of the sources of enjoyment to the children of God here below. We have still a few remarks to make on the nature of them.

They are not of a sensible, but of a spiritual kind. The senses are not affected by them, but the mind. The kingdom of God is not seen outwardly, but is within. Nor do we know Christ after the flesh. Nor are they merely intellectual, for this is a pleasure which an unconverted man can enjoy, in the pursuit of some favourite study, the perusal of some beautiful work, the listening to some eloquent discourse, or by the contemplation of noble acts and distinguished performances. Such an enjoyment, though of a more noble kind, is after all but of dubious worth.

The pleasures of which we here speak, are of a spiritual nature; that is, their author is the Spirit of Jesus Christ; they therefore presuppose spiritual subjects, regenerated individuals; for no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again. "The natural man understandeth not the things of the Spirit."

These sweetnesss in the kingdom of God are nothing rare or uncommon. We taste them, not only at the commencement, but they also refresh and cheer the heart in the sequel. They are often so overpowering, that the individual has been scarcely able to bear them. Frequently they last a long time, but often pass rapidly over. They generally succeed sorrow of heart; or give place to the latter.

This sweetness often extends itself far and wide; the wilderness and the solitary place are glad, and the desert blossoms as the rose. Then, even bodily sufferings are sweet, and pain, poverty, and distress; because the heart rejoices in the Lord. It even glories in tribulation, because it knows its utility. It glories in its weakness, that the power of Christ may rest upon it; and counts it all joy when it falls into many tempta-

tions, convinced that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. His commandments are then easy, and his burden is light.

Finally, we observe, that these sweetnesses do not essentially belong to genuine Christianity. If they cease, grace does not cease. These pleasing mountains may depart and these lovely hills be removed, but "my grace," says the Lord, "shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of my peace be broken." But it is essential to true religion to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus; to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to believe on him and to abide in him. If this be thy path, the requisite sweetness will from time to time be communicated to thee, and if thou continuest therein, and goest forward, thou wilt at length have an abundant entrance ministered to thee, into the kingdom of heaven, where there is fulness of joy in the presence of God, and pleasures for evermore at his right hand.

XXXIX.

HASHMONAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 29.

“ And they went from Mithcah, and pitched in Hashmonah.”

THIS twenty-fifth encampment is called Hashmonah, and signifies both a hasty multitude and a precipitate or hasty reckoning. We will consider it in both points of view.

Hashmonah—the hasty multitude. They hastened with particular rapidity away from the desert to Canaan. Even the locality of this encampment had something in it, which incited to haste. It lay, like the previous ones, not far from the borders of the promised land, and Judah's future inheritance, perhaps not even a league from it. An urgent cause for haste, in order that they might completely enter upon it. Besides this, they were weary of their long residence and wandering in the desert, which God himself describes as a howling wilderness, full of snakes and scorpions. From Mithcah also to this place, they were obliged again to direct their route towards the Red Sea, the

end of which they really reached at Ezion-gaber, the thirty-first encampment. Sufficient reason, therefore, for hastening, although it availed nothing, but rather proved injurious ; since it was necessary that the forty years should first be accomplished.

Haste implies exertion to attain any desired object as quickly as possible. There is a needful and a useful haste, as well as a needless, unbelieving, and, therefore, improper haste. We will consider it in both these points of view.

A needful and profitable haste is expressed by David in Psalm cxix. 60. " I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." These are things which suffer no delay, and are only prejudiced by it ; of this kind is repentance. It is the commencement of conversion, and with it, of life. How ought not every one to hasten with it until this is experienced ; how reasonable is it that the individual should have time for nothing else ! Such is the command of Christ :—" Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness." If a man does not hasten in this respect, but loiters, he walks on an extremely dangerous path, and it is very improbable that he will ever depart from it. The difficulties will not lessen, but increase. It is a snare of Satan, in which, alas ! he holds many captive. But here it may be said, as it was said to Lot, " Hasten, and save thy soul, and stay not in all the plain." There are those who do not deny the necessity of conversion, but will not admit that there is any need to be in haste, will not resolve upon putting their hand to the plough now, and of immediately imploring the influences of the Holy Spirit. This they think is of no such urgent importance ; some years hence will do quite as well. But

what saith the Scripture? "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts."

Haste is also useful and necessary, in rising up immediately after a surprise, stumble, or deviation, so that we may return to the true track without delay. When David delayed to do so, his moisture was turned into the drought of summer; but when he said, "I will confess my iniquity unto the Lord," he then forgave him the iniquity of his sin. Is there not a fountain open for sin and uncleanness? Wash in it, therefore, that ye may be clean, and suffer no spot to continue in your hearts and consciences.

Generally speaking, in every good work we ought to be mindful of the admonition of Solomon, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might." Slothfulness and procrastination are hurtful vices, even in earthly things—how much more so in those that are spiritual! In both instances, the expression of Solomon is true, "Idleness will clothe a man with rags; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." The evil results of idleness in temporal things are sufficiently obvious; but how is it in spiritual things, with reference to those who are so slothful in prayer, so negligent in self-denial, and the renunciation of all, in order to follow Christ? They remain just the same from year to year, or rather go back. They are a disgrace to religion, and unfruitful trees, which are in danger of being cut down and cast into the fire.

Different is the case with those, who feel with regret their coldness and deadness, and who mourn over it with tears. They pray with David, "Quicken me through thy word!" and with the bride, "Draw us, and we will run after thee." "The youths shall grow

weary, and the young men shall fall, but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up on wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk, and not faint."

Hastening, and the striving to reach the desired aim, is, therefore, an useful and necessary matter. But in order to be so, it must not only be practised, but also be regulated according to apostolic rules. "They all run," says Paul, "but one only obtains the prize. So run, therefore, that ye may obtain." "And every man that striveth for the mastery, is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible." (1 Cor. ix. 24, 25.) He that thinks to obtain the prize in his own strength, must learn to view the matter differently, and he whose sentiments respecting grace leave him inactive, is also in the wrong. Although a person may strive, yet is he "not crowned unless he strive lawfully."

There is, therefore, an irregular, useless, and injurious haste. Of this it is said in Isaiah xxviii. 16, "He that believeth, shall not make haste." Faith, therefore, does not hasten, and causes him who possesses and exercises it, not to haste; which definition gives us an insight into the true nature of faith.

The church, at the time when the prophet indited those words, had great things promised to it—that God should "lay in Zion a foundation, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, and a sure foundation." This was even then an ancient prediction. But what a long period elapsed, what numerous and astonishing events took place, before it was fulfilled! The Babylonish captivity of seventy years, the entire destruction of Jerusalem, the ceasing of the Jewish worship, and the

devastation of the whole country lay between, together with those lamentable occurrences under the Maccabees, related in the books which bear their name, But, says the Holy Spirit, “faith does not make haste.” It is willing to wait God’s time, and knows that the promise will certainly be fulfilled, although it may be long delayed, and although stupendous obstacles may intervene. To believers, great things are also promised; such as, the entire annihilation of the old man, perfect sanctification, a perfect consolation, the conversion of the heathen, &c. But yet how are these things really accomplished? Is it the same in grace as in nature, which may be seen advancing from day to day? The buds appear, the leaves and flowers unfold, the fruit succeeds, which increases in size, till it has attained to its full growth and ripeness. And can the work of grace be so gradually traced in a soul? Certainly not. Look only at the names of the different encampments. How are bitter and sweet mingled together! Consider the route. Haradah lay close to Egypt, whilst Rithmah bordered on Canaan. From Haradah, they again approached the promised land, and were as near it at Mithcah, as they had ever been, and yet now they again remove further off from it than before. Or consider the lives of the saints recorded in Scripture, and especially the Psalms. All these find no regular progress, but strange intermixtures. In short, the divine promises are certainly “Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus;” but between the believing apprehension of them and their complete fulfilment, lie deserts, mountains, precipices, rivers, and seas. Difficulties not unfrequently increase, the nearer the time of fulfilment approaches, and, on the whole, God fulfils them in such a manner,

that all the glory devolves upon him, and we are obliged to confess, that it is the Lord's doing.

But a hasty multitude is spoken of here. These are the characters that insist upon seeing, having, possessing, and enjoying, and that without delay; they will not abide by the promise, but must have its immediate fulfilment. If they are in suffering, they seek immediate deliverance, whether it has attained its object or not. If this is not the case, they become a prey to despondency, and think that what does not occur within a limited time, will never take place. When it is said to them, "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength"—they reply, "No; for we will flee upon horses." This improper haste is founded on unbelief, which neither knows God nor trusts him, and thinks, that so long as a matter is only in the hands of God, and not at the same time in its own, it is a very dubious and uncertain affair. Self-will also joins itself, and presumes to determine the time, way, and manner, and to regulate the sun by its watch; to these is added the man's own wisdom, which judges of the grace, love, and work of God in its own carnal manner, and is presumptuous enough to say, "If the Lord were with us, these things would not have happened to us;" if he loved us, he would show it in giving us this, or preserving us from that particular thing; and many more such painful conclusions, which unbelief dictates.

The hasty multitude think the time of waiting intolerably long; and like the Jews of old, they say, "When will the Sabbath be over?" (Amos viii. 5.) just as if it would never terminate. Will the Lord remember no more for ever? asks unbelief; to which

faith replies, "His wrath endureth but for a moment." It also apprehends the worst. David said in his haste, "I am cast out from the presence of the Lord; I shall one day fall by the hand of Saul;" and even Abraham was once afraid that he would be slain, before the promise was fulfilled. Instead of discovering in chastisements, a sign of the paternal love of God, they see in them nothing but wrath, and instead of hoping to derive benefit from them, they only fear destruction. Nay, they are even ready to say with Job, "thou art become cruel unto me," forgetting that "we have not a High Priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Finally, the hasty multitude readily speak and act without reflection. How precipitate was it of David to say, "All men are liars!" in which he had particular reference to what Samuel had promised him. How hasty was Job, in saying, "My soul desireth strangling and death rather than life;" and Jonah, because of his withered gourd, "I do well to be angry; even unto death!" Was it not also a very rash act of Moses, to strike the rock, instead of speaking to it, and then to say to the people, "Hear now, ye rebels, must we fetch you water out of this rock?" But thus it is, if we do not abide in God through faith, and place the anchor of our hope in the word of promise, which holds the rolling vessel on the tumultuous waves.

But let us also say something upon the assertion of the prophet, that "faith does not make haste." Why should it hasten, as long as God does not do so? What he has promised, he will certainly perform, and will do it in the proper way, order, and method, and at the most appropriate time. Cleaving to the promise, faith

stands firm, and quietly and confidently expects its fulfilment. He that believeth, as the Scripture saith, is fully assured of the love of God through Christ. He finds no hesitation in concluding that "He who spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all, will also most assuredly with him, freely give us all things." This renders his soul quiet and resigned, in whatever situations God may think proper to place him. As soon as the words, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is mighty in the weak," are apprehended by faith, the heart is tranquillized, and says, "I will, therefore, rather glory in my weakness; for when I am weak then am I strong."

In the possession of such a faith, though earth were to be shaken to its foundations, yet the man knows in whom he has believed, and is persuaded that he will keep what he has committed to him. If he does not help now, he will subsequently, and at the most suitable period. Does not a patient quietly resign himself to an able physician—a youth to a competent and kindly disposed teacher? and ought not a soul confidently to yield itself up to God, as its creator and redeemer, without fear or doubt?

Hence "he that believes, does not make haste," convinced that the long-suffering of God is salvation, and that he will as certainly satisfy the hungry with good things, as send the rich empty away. But Israel was at that time encamped in Hashmonah, and the multitude hastened.

Hashmonah also means a rash or hasty calculation. A hasty calculation, if correct, is good; but one that is over hasty, is incorrect. Both are also met with in the spiritual life.

The latter species of calculation is made by impenitent men in the most injurious sense. They do so when they regard their sins as trifling, their excuses as well founded, their good qualities, sentiments, and actions as considerable, the mercy of God as abundant, and the way to heaven so broad, that by this means they strengthen themselves in their impenitence, and yet expect to be saved. To these also belong such as place a very unholy confidence in the merits of Christ, without repentance and faith, and hence imagine they shall be saved, because Christ died for us; or think that if they can speak of the blood of Christ, nothing more is requisite. But in this they grossly deceive themselves; for it is only when "walking in the light, as he is in the light, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin;" but this they do not, and as long as this is the case, they miscalculate, and comfort themselves only to their own destruction.

Better souls than such frivolous characters, and even such as are sincerely devoted to God, frequently make hasty and incorrect calculations. The grieved and afflicted do so, when in heaviness through manifold temptations. You then think you will never be delivered from your barrenness, confusion, and the like. But why not? Is the Lord's arm shortened? Why do such evil thoughts arise in your hearts? Rather ought you to say with the church, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy! for when I fall I shall rise again, and though I sit in darkness, yet the Lord shall be a light unto me!" Your miscalculations shall be put to shame, when the Holy Spirit shall give you "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garments of praise for the spirit of heaviness." In a very opposite manner

do those err, who having been delivered from the waters of the first repentance, or the terrific abyss of temptation, are translated into a happy and blissful state, and think it will never be otherwise with them. But we see how near Mithcah, sweetness, lies to Hashmonah, a precipitate calculation.

Finally, it would be very advisable to sit down quickly, according to the parable of the unjust steward, in Luke xvi. and write fifty, as he did when he found he could not retain his situation, because his master said to him, "Give an account of thy stewardship." Solomon says, (Prov. iv. 11, 12.) "I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; when thou goest, thy steps shall not be straitened." And how many a painful hour would penitent souls escape, were they continually to acknowledge themselves guilty of having sinned against every divine command, and that in their flesh dwelt no good thing, but at the same time made use of the holy arithmetic recommended by Paul, when he says, "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ." (Rom. vi. 11.) They would then, whilst finding nothing in themselves but culpability, perceive in Christ their righteousness; and whilst deeply humbled by the one, be highly exalted by the other.

XL.

MOSEROTH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 30.

“And they departed from Hashmonah, and encamped at Moseroth.”

THIS twenty-sixth encampment of the children of Israel lies towards the Red Sea, and their route to it led them away from the promised land, along the desert of Paran and Sinai. The previous stations had been only a mile distant from each other ; but now they were obliged to travel forty miles without encamping, which must doubtless have caused them great fatigue and a variety of inconveniences, especially when we consider the number of children, sick, and old and infirm people they must have had with them. I know not whether they travelled by day or by night, under the guidance of the fiery and cloudy pillar. But the distance was so great, that they probably continued their journey by night as well as by day ; and of those who were obliged to be left behind, every possible care was taken. They were not in want of food ; for the mysterious manna still descended every morning and fell around the camp.

They were equally as little in want of water ; for the rock smitten at Rephidim followed them every where through the desert, and gave them water in abundance. They were as little deficient in clothes as in shoes, although they wore still the old ones they had brought with them out of Egypt, for they never wore out ; on which circumstance I leave you to your own reflections.

For this long and tedious journey they were probably recompensed on arriving at this new encampment. They had been latterly accustomed to be well situated in that respect, if not a little spoiled. The last encampment, indeed, did not seem to be quite what it ought to be. If they were in such haste they might indeed travel forty miles at a stretch ; but it was for them to see to it, whether they went backwards or forwards ; although in the ways of the Lord there is no retrograding. But what was the place appointed for their present encampment ? The term implies bonds, instruction, correction. These are good things ; but whether always agreeable or not is another question. At least concerning the last-mentioned signification, the Apostle says, “ No chastisement for the present seemeth to be joyous but grievous, yet afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of the Spirit to them that are exercised thereby,” (Heb. xii. 11,) and represents it as indispensable that the Father should correct every son whom he receiveth, declaring, that “ if we endure not chastisement, of which all are partakers, then are we bastards and not sons.”

Let us now consider more attentively the meaning of the word MoserOTH in its threefold signification, bonds, instruction, and correction.

The first interpretation leads us to regard the natural man in his bonds, and the necessity of his being unbound, and how the latter is accomplished.

Man, in his natural condition, lives in a state of licentious freedom ; hence the Scripture compares him to horses and mules, which would run wild, if not held in with bit and bridle. Man by nature strives after unlimited liberty, and instead of seeking it in an agreement with the will of God, he places it in the very opposite. This licentiousness shows itself indeed most prominently in the season of youth, particularly when favoured by outward circumstances ; nor does it disappear in after years.

But with all this apparent liberty, the natural man is nevertheless a servant of sin. Christ is represented by Isaiah as giving "liberty to the captive, and as opening the prison-doors to them that are bound." The bondage there implied is that of sin in general, and single sins in particular. Covetousness fetters the one, drunkenness, lust, &c. another. Unbelief binds him fast, and he is in bondage to the law, sin, and even Satan. This bondage, however disgraceful, cannot be thrown off ; nor is it always felt by those that are under it ; on the contrary, they frequently feel happy and free in it.

The individual therefore requires, first of all, to be loosened ; even as Christ ordered concerning the ass's colt, saying, " Loose him, and bring him hither." The fetters of sin must be burst, that it may lose its dominion, and that the individual may thank God, that though he was a servant of sin, and formerly unwise, disobedient, and out of the way, yet that now he is delivered from the snare of Satan, and from the king-

dom of darkness, that he is no longer under the law, but under grace, on which account sin is no longer able to rule over him, seeing that he has passed from death unto life.

But after being thus freed from sin, he must now become a servant of righteousness, and belong, with body and soul, in life and death, to Christ, and as one alive from the dead, yield up his members as instruments of righteousness unto holiness. Christ binds his people as closely to himself as the members are joined to the head, and as the branches are bound to the vine; so that he declares, that without him we can do nothing. The Son, indeed, makes free, but in such a manner, that those who are made free, abide in him and he in them, and they refuse to acknowledge any other freedom than that which consists in perfect subjection to Christ.

This deliverance from bondage is exclusively the work of Christ, who accomplishes it by his Holy Spirit. He destroys the works of the devil. He says to the prisoners, "Come forth!" He does this in its full extent, although by degrees. He is the commencement, progress, and termination, the author and finisher of our faith.

Moseroth betokens, secondly, instruction; and this is also something that we much require. Paul says, "the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godlily in this present world." We require instruction because of our blindness with respect to spiritual things, of which the natural man knows

nothing, nor can he comprehend them. Hence every one requires that his eyes should be opened, in order that he may turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, to receive the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them that are sanctified, through faith in Christ.

At Moseroth, deep insight is obtained into "the mystery of God and the Father, and of Christ, in whom lie hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The individual then understands more of the substance of the divine doctrine, which leaves all human doctrines far behind in sublimity, holiness and suitableness; yea, it presents itself as that which had never entered into the human heart, but which God has revealed unto us by his Spirit.

A few words more on the word Moseroth as signifying correction or chastisement. Thus David uses the word in the 38th Psalm, when he prays, saying, "Chasten me not in thy hot displeasure." And in Psalm xxxix. he says, "When thou with rebukes, dost chasten man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like the moth." Paul justly considers chastisement as belonging to natural, as well as spiritual education. "We have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of Spirits, and live? for they chastened us after their own pleasure, but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. For in this very respect he dealeth with us as with sons." Here correction presupposes naughtiness, which causes it, and which must be eradicated by it. It arises from affection and care for the child, and the

more ardent and prudent the latter are, and the more important the destiny of the child, the more strict the discipline. If a person is set to learn something thoroughly, the smallest fault is not overlooked, and the dearest child is placed under the strictest management.

Corrections have certainly always something of a painful nature, either more or less. At one time they have reference to outward circumstances; at another they are inward sufferings, the hiding of God's countenance, want of courage and consolation, withdrawal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and even the feeling of the divine displeasure. He chooses his people in the furnace of affliction. He is like a refiner's fire, and sits and purifies the sons of Levi. They are compared to gold, and tribulation is the purifying flame. The purer the gold is destined to become, the greater the heat.

Chastisement presupposes faults; and even children of God still commit these, and have to do with a Father who is strict in this respect. If we do not suffer dust to lie on our costly furniture, much less God on his people. The question here has not reference merely to words and actions, but also to thoughts, dispositions, motives, and intentions. Nothing impure can pass, except for a time; and the Apostle establishes it as a general rule, that "every work, of whatever kind it is, shall be tried by fire." (1 Cor. iii. 13.) MoserOTH, correction, is therefore certainly one of the encampments of the Israel of God where his people are prepared for the heavenly Canaan. Its intention and effect is the eradication of adhering imperfections; it humbles, it purifies, it corrects, it preserves. In one word,

chastisement, together with the word of God, are the means of making us partakers of his holiness; and this is the highest state to which we can attain. If therefore the pillar of fire and of cloud direct us thither, let us willingly travel the forty miles, and encamp at Moseroth.

XLI.

BENE-JAAKAN.

NUMB. xxxiii. 31.

“And they departed from Moseroth, and pitched in Bene-jaakan.”

A PROPER answer is often of great importance, and it was a dreadful thing, when the man who entered the festive hall was addressed by the king with the words, “Friend, how camest thou in hither without a wedding-garment?” and he was speechless. “And the king ordered him to be bound hand and foot, and taken away, and cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.” Dreadful result! awful inability to reply! But what offence had the man committed? Nothing more than his not having on a wedding-garment. And his crime consisted in presuming to appear without it. But why did not the man excuse himself, and begin to say, “Lord, thou hast invited, nay, even in some measure, compelled all sorts of vagabonds and beggars to come,

and yet afterwards art angry about wedding-garments ! What crying injustice ! Who can expect poor people that come from the highways and hedges, to bring garments with them, suitable for such a marriage feast as this ?” But this he was not able to say, for according to the custom of the East, every guest is presented by the master of the feast with a festive robe, called a caftan. This man had therefore refused to accept it. And for what reason ? He was deceived by the good opinion he had of his own dress, which, comparatively, might have been very decent. He thought highly of himself in it, and lightly of others, even in their caftans, which, it is true, were borrowed, and did not belong to them. This proud self-complacent opinion was his ruin. O, if he had only been humble ! Let us become so betimes, and therefore encamp with the children of Israel where we now find them.

The name of this twenty-seventh encampment is Bene-jaakan. It also lies further off from Canaan, and nearer to the Red Sea. Its name signifies children of apprehension or of the oppressor, or penitent children.

This is a very natural result of correction, from whence the previous station derived its name. We find a beautiful exposition of this word in Psalm cxix. 67, 71, and 75, where the Psalmist says, “ Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.” “ It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.” “ I know, O Lord ! that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.”

The Psalmist speaks of a threefold humiliation, and a threefold advantage derivable from it. The first is re-

storation from error and consequent keeping of the divine word. The second consists in learning the divine statutes. And in the third, which lasted the longest, the truth and faithfulness of God was manifested. Let us, therefore, briefly consider this threefold beneficial effect of being afflicted.

Real humility implies, generally, that the individual considers himself ignorant, weak, poor, needy, and wretched. It commences in an individual when he looks at things differently to what he did before. He was like a sheep, going astray, and was pleased with it. But he now begins to perceive, that he is in the wrong, and that a great change must take place in him, else the result will be awful. He begins to observe that he is spiritually diseased, a sinner, and ungodly, and thus begins to divest himself of a fatal and fundamental error. This is an important commencement of humiliation. Does it exist in you all? This sight of our own deficiencies ought powerfully to operate on every one.

This change of sentiment awakens the man out of his previous slumber. It disturbs the dangerous rest he had hitherto enjoyed. It is accompanied with many accusations, and bitter inward reproofs, as well as grievous apprehensions, lest it should now be too late, the door be shut, and the Lord no longer inclined towards him. Fear, terror, and anxiety are excited in the mind; and thus the man is humbled, rendered little, desponding, and timid.

Hence arise various good resolutions and determinations. Henceforth he is resolved to be a different character, he will no longer act as he has hitherto done, he is firmly resolved zealously to pursue another path;

he will now seek none but Jesus, and execrate that which grieves him. He avails himself of what strengthens these resolutions, and avoids what may shake them.

They ripen also into actions. By these gracious attractions, the man becomes inclined and induced to avoid a variety of evil, and to do much that is good, however difficult both may be to him, and whatever constraint and effort it may cost him.

This we may call a preparatory, general humiliation ; but then follows one of a deeper and more complete nature. “ I know, O Lord,” says David, “ that thy judgments are right, and that in faithfulness thou hast afflicted me ;” which faithfulness manifests itself in prosecuting this humiliation to the attainment of its aim ; which is, a more profound knowledge of self and sin, which leaves the man scarcely any thing of what is good, and renders every thing sinful, even the most indifferent actions, because nothing is done aright, when brought before the inward tribunal. It is no longer enough that good actions are performed, but they are judged of according to their inward nature, motives, and intentions, even with regard to prayer and benevolent actions.

Besides all this, inward corruption and concupiscence manifest themselves more and more, which cause the individual to think more lightly of himself than before. This humiliation is occasioned by judgments, as David also says. The more the man is visited by painful providential dispensations, and temptations, and trials of various kinds, the more he perceives how every thing in him, except the grace he has received, is corrupt and opposed to the divine will. How dif-

difficult does he find it to reconcile himself to all the ways of God, and even occasionally to keep himself from murmuring and despondency! He feels that in his flesh dwelleth no good thing, and therefore humbles himself under the mighty hand of God, that he may be delivered from the body of sin and death. He acknowledges that the Lord's judgments are right; and when overtaken by some grievous fault, he exclaims, in the penitential language of David, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest."

Great, however, is the benefit of these humiliations. From how many important errors is the individual cleansed, which he cherished with respect to man, his power and wisdom, and with respect to grace and its operations. He learns the statutes of the Lord, and keeps his word. He humbles himself, and to such individuals, God gives grace. He seeks his salvation the more fully in Christ, the less of ability and sufficiency he feels in himself. In his clearer moments, when perceiving these advantages, he says with David, "It was good for me to have been afflicted," so that in the end, I knew not what to answer. He gives himself up with renewed readiness to humiliation, however painful it may be, and is willing to be weak, that the Lord may be his strength; to be nothing, that the Lord may be all; to be poor, that his riches may be magnified in him, and to be little, that he alone may be great.

The holy prophet especially commends the faithfulness of God, which had manifested itself in afflicting him; and this faithfulness evidences itself in various

ways. The affliction is neither too great nor too little. It does not last longer than is good for the individual, nor does it cease too soon. The Lord does not concern himself about the complaint which may be made, but carries through his salutary purposes. He regulates the humiliation according to the necessities of each, and attacks him in the most painful part, but just where it is the most required. He supports the soul in enduring it, even though the waters may rise to the very lips, and the snows roll over our heads. At the proper time, the water is turned into wine, the gold is taken out of the fire, the wind and the waves are commanded to be still, and Lazarus, though buried, comes forth again alive.

But there is another species of humiliation, which is still more wearisome, and which continues even to the end of the pilgrimage through the wilderness. There is a humiliation of *the will*. How gladly would Moses have entered into Canaan! And yet the answer to his earnest entreaty was, *Let it suffice thee*; speak no more of it. How gladly would Paul have been freed from the buffetings of men! But it was said to him, “My grace is sufficient for thee.” The Lord at one time grants every request, at another, none. The individual must give up his will, however correct it may appear.

There are also humiliations of *knowledge*, so that the man can no longer make any use of what he knows. Israel says, “My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over me by my God,” and acts as if he had never heard that “the Lord giveth strength to the weary and power to the faint.” In their distress, the disciples no longer remembered that their Lord

had said, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice."

There are humiliations of *strength*. If previously the individual was able in his own strength to order, regulate, effect, and avert many things, he feels deprived of this ability, and sees himself reduced to faith in the Lord, who has promised to be powerful in the weak. But in this case also, things do not go as we would have them; and after being able to say, "I can do all things," we are constrained to exclaim, "Thou weakenest my strength in the way."

There is also a bringing down of *self-estimation*. "He that thinks himself to be something," says the Apostle, "deceiveth himself." And these words contain much. We must, therefore, not even think we are any thing, let alone something! But who is there that acts according to this? In so far, however, as we are still something in ourselves, Christ is not yet all in all to us, as he ought to be. We must lose our own lives, and consequently every thing. Hence we may infer, how far we have still to travel, before we can creep through such a needle's eye, and before we reach the prize of our high calling.

Finally, there are humiliations of our own *views and sentiments*. Thy insight into the gospel, the covenant of grace, and the atonement may be very clear; but it may also become darkened, and will be so, if advantageous to thee. Therefore, be not high-minded. Thou hast much courage, boldness, comfort, gifts. But the more thou hast, the more can be taken away from thee, so far as *thou* hast it. Thou art a believer, and it is not difficult for thee to apply the gospel to thyself; thou possessest assurance and a state of enjoy-

ment. If retained in it, be abundantly thankful, nor depart from poverty of spirit, but enter ever deeper into it; be exceedingly humble. The Lord will then give thee more than what thou hast already.

Since it is of such great advantage to be humbled, may the Lord faithfully humble us, that we may not go astray, but learn his word, keep his statutes, and obtain the grace which the Lord giveth to the humble! Amen.

XLII.

HOR-HAGIDGAD.

NUMB. xxxiii. 32.

“ And they removed from Bene-jaakan, and encamped at Hor-hagidgad.”

THE name of this twenty-eighth encampment has a singular sound ; but its signification is not evil. It is a considerable distance from the last station, being about thirty miles. It lies in the desert of Sinai, opposite that mountain, and in the direction of the Red Sea. The Israelites have Canaan, therefore, behind them, and remove ever further from it, as if they should never arrive there.

The first signification of the name of this encampment is that of a martial host. Jacob's seventh son was called Gad, signifying a troop. His dying father alludes to this name in the blessing bestowed on his sons. Gad and Reuben were the two tribes, which had their inheritance assigned them on this side of Jordan, and engaged, (according to Numb. xxxii. 17.) “ to go ready armed before the children of Israel, and

go armed before the Lord to the war," which promise they also fulfilled.

The church of Jesus Christ is certainly a host, at the head of which is the King of kings, and the Lord of lords. They stand opposed to that other great and numerous host called the world, which has Satan at its head. The former is the Lord's portion, the lot of his inheritance. They are many, but all members of one body. They are all God's peculiar workmanship, created anew in Christ Jesus unto good works. God manifests his glory in them, and they are as a mirror, in which the glory of the Lord reflects itself. The greater part of them are in heaven, but there is still a considerable number on earth, who await a mighty accession.

This part here on earth, is called the church militant, and is justly termed Gidgad, a martial host. This people are a conquered nation. They were the prey of "the strong man armed," and captives of Satan, but the prey has been taken from the mighty, and the captive has been liberated. For then the mighty Prince of Peace carried on that eternally memorable, and blessed war, in which he marched against the prince of this world, when this roaring lion assaulted the lion of the tribe of Judah. He gave his life as an atoning sacrifice, and now sees the fruit of it. "He spoiled principalities and powers and made a show of them openly." Thus did he deliver his people from the kingdom of darkness.

This victorious war, by which the whole host is benefited, he carried on for each in particular; for whilst the strong man armed was keeping his goods in peace,

a stronger than he came upon him, and took them away. He conquered, and after his victory his people willingly pay their offerings to him in the beauty of holiness. Thus a portion with the great was divided him, and of the spoil of the strong, because he poured out his soul unto death, and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The church of Christ is justly called Gidgad, a martial host; for like Israel, they are destined for war. They are soldiers of Jesus Christ. Their last word is, "I have fought a good fight;" their task, to strive together for the faith once delivered to the saints. If they wish to inherit all things, they must overcome, even as their king overcame, and having done all, must stand and keep the field. Palms are only bestowed on those who have fought and conquered.

True Christians are born for conflict; the Spirit is imparted to them through regeneration, which wars against the flesh, and stands in inviolable opposition to all sin. But no sooner is this child born in the manger of our hearts, than some Herod or other seeks after its life. The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and these two are contrary, the one to the other.

They are also equipped for the fight, and the church is described, in Solomon's Song, as "terrible as an army with banners." "In all these things," says Paul, "we come off more than conquerors." How admirably, therefore, must they be armed and accoutred! The weakest of them shall be as David. Every one of them "has his sword upon his thigh, because of fear in the night." God teaches their hands to war. And whilst thus putting on the whole armour of God, they are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his

might ; and thus rendered competent to vanquish their enemies.

The war they carry on is a most important one, no carnal, but a spiritual warfare ; not with flesh and blood and outward things, which require bodily strength, have Christians to do. The armour as well as the warfare is spiritual ; the heart, the inmost soul, is the field of battle, the scene of action, where, without outward noise and invisibly, battles are fought, defeats sustained, and victories won, which are visible to God alone. This war has for its object nothing less than the soul and its salvation, hell and heaven ; to reach the latter and escape the former. Its object is the favour of God, the most glorious liberty, or the most degrading bondage, eternal life, or eternal death.

It is a necessary war. As little as Israel could, without war, obtain possession of the land of Canaan, so little can any one, without conflict, reach heaven. If any one refuses to enter into the conflict against the world and sin, God fights against him ; and if he be against him, who can be for him ? Neutral can none remain ; and as no one can possibly serve such opposite masters as God and Satan, he must adhere to one or other of them.

This warfare is tedious, since it begins with our spiritual birth, and ceases only with our exit from this scene of conflict. It is not indeed always equally violent ; the “ evil day ” mentioned by Paul, (Ephes. vi. 13.) does not always continue ; but it may reappear any moment. Hence it is necessary for a Christian “ to pray without ceasing,” and to watch thereunto with all perseverance and supplication in spirit. But there are also seasons of repose, when no

further exertion is required; and the warrior enjoys a rest from his fatigues.

The conflict of Christians is arduous, both on account of their weakness and the nature of their foes. The warriors themselves are weak, so weak that they could not stand of themselves a moment. There is even something in them that sides with their opponents, and seeks to procure them the victory, which renders it doubly dangerous. The foes are bold, so that the chief of them even ventured to attack the Son of God himself. They are so powerful, that they have overthrown the greatest saints, and hence are compared to lions. If Adam was overcome, how are others to stand? They are as subtle as serpents, and equally poisonous. They attack every thing, chastity, patience, humility, love, &c. They do not spare even historical faith, but seek first of all to shake our confidence and hope. One man they try to overthrow by holding up his sins to his view; another by presenting to him the mirror of his virtues; one through lust, another through fear; some through frivolity, and others through excessive sorrow. If the conflict be difficult, the decision to undertake it is not easy. Who gladly abandons every thing to follow Christ, who immediately presents us with a cross? Who, unless in case of extremity, can bear the loss of an eye, a hand, or a foot?

Still it is a "good fight." Happy he who enters upon it! he will never repent of it! It ends well, and all must run with patience the race set before them. Should some single rencontre prove unsuccessful, or some battle be lost, all is not therefore lost. Wounds heal again, fractures are reduced, losses are replaced.

We have a glorious leader, needful assistance, and at last a glorious prize. In reality, we have only to do with foes that have been long overcome.

For it is, lastly, a supernatural warfare, no strength or wisdom of our own is requisite for it ; on the contrary, we shall be the more competent to it, the more thoroughly our souls are emptied of every hope of that nature. We fall more seldom on account of our weakness than on account of our supposed strength. We ought indeed to strive against *every* sin ; particularly against those to which we are the most easily incited ; *unweariedly*, even when we cannot immediately act the master over them as we could wish ; *seriously*, that we may be heartily in earnest to gain the victory, the entire extirpation of all that is evil, and perfect restoration to the image of God ; but we must also strive courageously, as those who have, in the Lord, righteousness and strength, and come off more than conquerors in him ; as those who are hastening to certain conquest and a glorious crown.

Hence the church of Jesus Christ is justly called a martial host ; and how much Israel was so, evidenced itself on their entrance into Canaan, where they had to do with giants, compared with whom they were but as grasshoppers, and yet they overcame.

Let us now consider, also, the signification of the first syllable of the name of this encampment, called Hor. It means, first, something noble, excellent, and superior. Hence, by the addition of this word, this martial host is designated as partaking of these qualities. It has elsewhere inferior appellations, such as a worm, a poor flock, a wretched or miserable person. But here the people of God have a noble and illus-

trious title. And this by right. They are noble on account of their birth. They are born of God, and consequently of divine descent. They are therefore children of God. Even according to the flesh, they are nearly related to him, for as they possess flesh and blood, so the Son of God likewise took part of the same. With all their lowliness, Christians possess something of nobility on account of their almost incredible dignity. They are called the bride of the Lamb, priests, and kings. And they have not merely the title of this, but they possess and enjoy all the privileges connected with these appellations. They are the objects of so great a love of the Son of God, that he declares, "as the Father loveth me, even so love I you." As priests they have liberty of access to God, as well as under obligation to offer up daily their old man to him. As kings they reign, and every thing must be of service to them, even death itself. They are noble on account of their state, being righteous, holy, and beloved. So righteous, that they can challenge every one, and ask, "Who is he that condemneth?" So holy, that there is no spot in them. So dear, that the Lord's bowels melt over them. They are a temple of God, in which he walks and dwells, and he himself is a wall of fire round about them. Their state is so sublime, that as saints they shall judge the world, and even angels. What privileges also do they enjoy, when all things must work together for their good! The cloudy pillar of the righteousness of Christ covers them daily, as birds do their brood. The pillar of fire prepares a way for them. What noble sentiments dwell within them, seeing that they are spiritually-minded! they delight in the law of God, and

serve it with their minds. They seek that which is above; not earthly things. They love God, and are ready for his sake to avoid, suffer, and renounce every thing, and prove this when called to it, by their actions. Christians are also noble on account of their riches, which are so considerable, that our Lord himself says, "Thou art rich." (Rev. ii. 9.) "Ye are enriched in all things," writes Paul to the Corinthians, and even says, "all things are yours." And these riches are beyond the reach of earthly mutability, they never fade away. They bear indeed this treasure in earthen vessels, but "when Christ their life shall appear, they shall also appear with him in glory." Finally, they possess a power by which all things are possible to him that believeth. It is in vain to make war upon them, for they come off more than conquerors. No one has reason to say, "I am weak."

Now let every one judge, whether this martial host does not justly bear the name of noble and illustrious. Yet still they deserve these appellations only on account of their head, and their connection with him. Without him, they would only be like a headless trunk, hateful to the sight, and dead. The glory of their head reflects itself in them, and what they are, is solely the result of their adherence to their head. Let us also seek to manifest ourselves as a true Hor-gidgad, an illustrious host.

But this noble armament marches under the restraint of the divine commands and guidance. They have taken Jesus' yoke upon them, and bear his burden. They do not give the reins to their desires, but crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts. They walk not on a broad, but a narrow way, a way which becomes

increasingly narrow, and are under strict discipline, which admits of no infraction. They call upon him as their Father, who, without respect of person, judges of every man's work, and pass the time of their sojourning here in fear. To them it is said, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Where this is not the case, the individual does not belong to this noble army, and only they that have walked uprightly attain to peace. They have all sworn, and will perform it, that they will keep his statutes.

Another interpretation of the word Hor, is a hole, or narrow cavity; and no one enters into the kingdom of God, except through a strait gate, where every thing must be left behind. Self-will, self-confidence, our own wisdom, and the entire old man must be brought as a sacrifice. This gate is low, and it is necessary to stoop down in order to pass through it. We must become increasingly humble, until we are at length nothing, and Christ in us is all.

The word Hor has also a third signification, and means a basket, or vessel. "We have this treasure," says Paul, "in earthen vessels." We are ourselves such vessels, and are empty, unless the Lord deposits in them his grace and gifts. We ought also to be empty, that the oil of divine grace may pour itself into us, and imitate the children of Israel, who went out every morning with an empty vessel to gather manna.

Finally, the word may also mean *nets*. In this sense the church and its head, by means of his servants, cast a great net into the sea of this world to catch men. They themselves are happily caught

in this net, are united and kept in it, and will at length be drawn to the shores of eternal peace. The church continues to cast the gospel-net, for the purpose of catching men, and is particularly occupied at present in fishing for the heathen. For a while it may labour in vain ; but soon the net will burst with the quantity caught, and they will draw an abundance to land. Let every one take heed, that he is not thrown away as a worthless fish ; but that the angels at last may gather us out of it as good, into vessels.

XLIII.

JOTBATHAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 33.

“And they went from Hor-hagidgad, and pitched in Jotbathah.”

THIS twenty-ninth encampment is about thirty miles from the former, and in the same direction towards the Red Sea, away from Canaan. It has an agreeable name, although with an unpleasant addition. It means good-town; but *bathah* also signifies desert, and both are so mingled together, that it might be rendered “good desert.” If the children of Israel were acquainted with the name of the place beforehand, they would have been cheered in proceeding to it. If they gave the encampment subsequently this name, it is a proof how comfortable they were there. However, there was another Jotbathah in Canaan itself, where they were doubtless much better situated.

A variety of passages in the Old Testament prove that the name, Jothbah, has a pleasing signification, and implies prosperity, pleasure, beneficence. Let us,

therefore, consider something of the blessings enjoyed by the true Christian, both in the wilderness of this life, and as in reserve for him beyond it.

Jotbathah, good-town, lay in the desert. Another of the same name in Canaan itself. The good that real Christians enjoy in the wilderness of this life, must not be derived from earthly things, nor must it be placed in the enjoyment, but in the possession of spiritual blessings by faith.

We must first of all ascertain who the persons are to whom this applies. They are true Christians—true, in contra-distinction to nominal, hypocritical, and pretended Christians. But who is a true Christian? The word originally means an Anointed One; and hence he is one, who has received the Holy Ghost, and no other; for “he that hath not the Spirit of Christ is none of his,” and those only are children of God, who are led by the Spirit of God. But who possesses the Holy Spirit? This may be ascertained from the effects produced by him, which, however, manifest themselves more clearly in one individual than another. But the Lord knoweth them that are his. Where the Spirit of God is, there he works and operates. Having revealed to the previously careless and self-righteous individual his wretched, sinful, and lost condition, he continues to do so, “convincing the world of sin.” He commences the cure by wounding, and the healing by making the individual sick, or rather, causing him to feel his sickness.

The Spirit of God, as a Holy Spirit, further imparts to the man who had previously been in love with sin, a profound abhorrence of every thing of the kind, so that he avoids it with his utmost ability. He knows no

greater misery than sin, nor any greater misfortune than to be under its sway, and to commit sin. He therefore most heartily desires to be delivered from the body of sin and death, and justly considers such a deliverance as the greatest benefit that can be bestowed on him. For this purpose, he wrestles, prays, and intreats.

The Holy Spirit then points out to him Jesus Christ as the way, and the only and complete Saviour of those who feel themselves lost sinners, and who came into the world for that purpose. He urges him to take refuge with him, and to entreat salvation of him. The man then hungers and thirsts after his favour, and is enabled to appropriate Christ to himself with all freedom and confidence, to be quite assured of salvation in him, and so to believe that he no longer doubts. And this is certainly being encamped in Jotbathah, or good-town.

And now the Holy Spirit continues his work of enlightening, humbling, correcting; the work of consoling, sanctifying, and renewing, and he now renders the soul meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, into which he will in due time be received. And these are the Spirit's works, by means of which a man becomes a Christian; which each, therefore, must experience, and does so, if saved.

These are, therefore, the persons who are encamped in Jotbathah. But the blessings they possess are not of an earthly or temporal nature. They even fear the latter as a foe, against which it is necessary to be on their guard. The spiritual and heavenly mind implanted in them from above, longs after spiritual blessings in heavenly places, and says, "Thy favour

is life, and thy loving-kindness is better than life." The soul in the possession of these, can easily bear to be deprived of every thing else. But if they are withdrawn, nothing can supply their place. He that hath tasted of the power of the world to come, is, so to speak, weaned from the relish of earthly things, and woe to him, if this be not the case !

But if the blessings of Christians do not consist in temporal things, they consist so much the more in those that are spiritual. In this respect it is always well with them, and they are continually encamped, even in this world, at Jotbathah. Their names are written in heaven ; the triune God loves them and is gracious to them, all their sins are forgiven them, and their sinful nature, with which they have continually to strive, is covered with the sufferings and death of Christ, until it is at length taken completely away. They have an intercessor with the Father. They are constantly kept by the power of God unto salvation. They are redeemed from all their sins. In one word, they are partakers of Christ, and all his gifts and treasures, the riches of which are unsearchable. How can it be otherwise than well with them under every circumstance, since they are accepted in the beloved, and since all things work together for their good ?

All these blessings they have in possession, but not in continued enjoyment, yet occasionally they enjoy sweet seasons of refreshment from the presence of the Lord. The Spirit testifies powerfully with their spirits, that they are the children of God. The love of God is shed abroad in their hearts. They are perfectly conscious of their being in the divine favour. The clear light of the gospel shines upon them, so that they are

able to confess and say, "We are made perfect in him." They celebrate a happy Sabbath, in which they rest in a very refreshing manner from their labours, and are able to say, "Thy Spirit does my work, my prayer is enjoyment!" In one word, all is well with them. The Lord fulfils their desires, and, before they call, he answers. Nothing is difficult, but all is easy and natural to them. And this is being sensibly encamped in Jotbathah.

But the word "bathah" also means desert. They must not reckon upon the continuance of such a happy state. "We are saved," says the Apostle, but still it is through hope. But the hope that is seen, is no longer hope, but enjoyment. Thus there are also two Jotbathahs, the one in the wilderness, the other in Canaan, which is mentioned in 2 Kings xxi. 19, with the omission of the last syllable, with which also the allusion to the wilderness ceases. If the church has already its Jotbathah, a better one still awaits her, to which the addition of imperfection, attached to that which she at present enjoys, will be wanting.

Hasten, therefore, to Jotbathah, if you wish to become true Christians! for he that is not a true Christian is an unhappy man, even were he a king. He that is a true Christian is happy, even in the midst of sufferings. Hence he who is wise, makes it his chief concern to become and continue a Christian. But this is the work of God alone. Yet, "if ye who are evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children—how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

XLIV.

EBRONAH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 34.

“And they removed from Jotbathah, and encamped at Ebronah.”

THE camp of the children of Israel presented a beautiful and astonishing sight. It formed an immense square, comprising many straight principal streets, and a great number of small ones. Three tribes encamped on each side, each of which had its leader and a particular banner. In the midst was a large open square, in which stood the tabernacle, the visible residence of the invisible God. On important occasions, Moses went into it to ask advice of God. Above it rose the cloudy pillar, which could be seen from all parts of the camp. During the day, it served as a defence against the scorching rays of the sun. In the night it diffused a strong light. It gave the signal for departure by elevating itself from the tabernacle, on which, the tabernacle, as well as the whole camp, was broken up. It went before, to point out the way, and designated the place of encampment by standing still. Throughout

the camp, no hard work was performed, except the going out every morning to gather manna, and the setting up and taking down of the tents, which, however, on the average, occurred only once a year. There was no beggar, nor any trade carried on in the whole camp. A pleasing tranquillity reigned throughout, and the whole formed a New Testament constitution—Christ all in all. Him they fed upon in the manna, and drank in the water from the smitten rock. Him they consulted, and he answered them; he was their defender, guide, escort, and counsellor.

Under his guidance they broke up from “Goodtown,” and were directed to Ebronah, their thirtieth encampment. This word has various significations, which we will consider seriatim.

1. It signifies a passing through, as through a door. And is not our earthly life such a passing through, even as the whole journey of the children of Israel through the Arabian desert might be termed Ebronah, a passage through? for “here we have no continuing city.” However willing we might be to linger behind, yet the stream of time carries us forward without stopping. We must not wish to stay in our natural state, but seek to enter in at the strait gate—the gate of repentance, a real, thorough, and entire change of mind and sentiment, which every one must experience who wishes happily to pass through this life. It is true none can place himself in this state; and it is even true that many seek to enter in, and are not able. Entreat the Lord, therefore, mercifully to work in thee, both to will and to do.

But if this favour is granted thee, thou wilt have to pass through much self-denial, although this is nothing

particular, since the natural man is also obliged to suffer the want of many things. Why should a Christian complain, therefore, of having to deny himself, since he enjoys at the same time the divine aid? and for which he will be re-compensated a hundred fold.

He has also to pass through tribulation; but why should he fear it? Are those whose path leads to perdition, without trouble in this world? Is godliness a means of defending us against it, or is it not rather profitable for all things? How unreasonable, therefore, the cry, that the way to heaven is such a painful one! On the contrary, what consolations are experienced in it, compared with which, the pleasures of the world are as nothing. In every case, for the Christian, it is only a passing through, whilst the impenitent finally perish in a sea of troubles. For death, which is the termination of the passage, makes an end of all the believer's troubles, and is the commencement of supreme felicity; whilst, to the unbeliever, it terminates his happiness, and is the beginning of extreme misery. "Stand in the ways, therefore, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way? And walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." (Jer. vi. 16.)

2. The word Ebronah has also an evil signification, and indicates a transgression of the law. As it is written in Hosea vi. 7, "But they have transgressed the covenant, and have dealt treacherously with me." However heinous the transgression, so much the more needful is it duly to be conscious of it. This constitutes a part of the repentance we previously mentioned. But this is not done by merely confessing that we are sinners like all others, by which is only meant, that no one

is perfect and without fault. The Lord, however, leads those whom he conducts to Canaan, to Ebronah, into the knowledge of their transgressions. By his Spirit, he sets before them every single sin, so that they can no longer regard themselves as innocent, but culpable. He also reveals to them the depravity of their natures, which are by no means fit for the kingdom of heaven, and must be totally changed. But the true knowledge of self and sin is connected with sincere repentance and contrition, and not unfrequently with fear and terror, when the man feels at the same time his unbelief, and expects nothing good from God, but beholds him as revealed in the law rather than in the gospel, and when his holiness rather than his mercy shines upon him. This is the plough, by which the soil of the heart must be turned up and prepared for receiving the seed of the gospel.

3. Yet this word has also the pleasing signification of the removal of this feeling of wretchedness. This removal of transgression is accomplished by the sacrifice of Christ, when the Lamb of God took away the sin of the world, by which it was plunged into the depths of the sea and cast behind the face of God. Jesus's dying day was the great day which God had predicted five hundred years before; that in one day he would remove the iniquity of the land. (Zech. iii. 9.) For with this one offering he has perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The second mode of taking away sin is in being renewed and sanctified. In the announcement of restoration to the divine favour for the sake of Christ, a complete renovation, so to speak, descends into the soul. With this pleasing scourge the Lord Jesus expels all the earthly propensities from the soul, and makes it

a house of prayer. The cross comes; inward corruption is more clearly felt, as well as our total dependance on the Lord and his grace. This renovation is carried on through life, until it receives its longed-for consummation. The heart is gradually made right with God, the eye becomes single, the image of the earthly passes away, and the image of the heavenly is restored, until the man awakes, satisfied with his likeness.

4. The name of this encampment has also other significations. It may likewise be rendered wrath. With reference to man it is said, "The wrath of man worketh not that which is right before God." Hence believers are enjoined not to "let the sun go down upon their wrath." The Scriptures also speak of the wrath of God, which is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness. "Who knoweth the power of thy wrath? We are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath we are troubled," says Moses, in Psalm xc. Perhaps many died in this very place in consequence of the divine displeasure, which gave occasion to give it a name indicative of anger. How seriously ought every one to strive for its removal; and yet how few there are who know and believe the power of his anger!

5. This is the same word from whence the Jews derive the name of Hebrews, which Luther translates "foreigners." In this sense, we must all become Hebrews spiritually, that is, strangers and pilgrims, who seek a better country. We are hastening towards eternity, and the translation into it is a very important step. Being ignorant of the precise moment of this transition, it is necessary that we be at all times in a state of preparation for it. Christ is the way, the truth,

and the life; he that believeth on him is passed from death unto life, and shall not come into condemnation. It is by "abiding in him, that when he shall appear, we have confidence, and shall not be ashamed before him at his coming." (1 John ii. 28.)

6. Ebronah, when divided into two words, Eb and Ronah, signifies a loud sound or violent outcry. If Christ himself in the days of his flesh poured out his supplications with strong crying and tears, his followers must also be content to be placed in such circumstances where this is requisite. Desire may be so strong, necessity so urgent, and the longing for help so ardent, that it breaks out into a loud cry; of which we have many instances in the Scriptures.

The word may also imply violent weeping; of which there is also no want of remarkable instances; at the head of these is our Lord himself. But with regard to the true Christians, the promise is applicable, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning;" and hence it is remarkable, that Ebronah may be also rendered excessive joy; thus we read of the sons of God "shouting for joy." (Job xxxviii. 7.) The church is occasionally encamped at an Ebronah, where it breaks out into thanksgiving and praise, and into loud exultation, even as it is said in Isaiah xii. 6, "Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion; for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee!"

It likewise implies power in *prayer*; when the Holy Spirit descends upon the soul, as the Spirit of grace and supplication, so that it pours itself out in fervent prayer, that ceases not, that takes the kingdom of heaven by violence, and of which Christ says, "What-

soever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive;" a prayer full of holy devotion, which causes the soul to forget the world and itself; a prayer of heavenly unction, where neither tears nor praise is wanting, and which is sure of being answered. Lord, teach us thus to pray! In particular, it denotes a powerful *intercession*. "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much," when it is effectual and fervent or inwrought. Therefore offer up prayers, supplications, and intercessions for all men.

This encampment, therefore, is the opposite of every thing of an indecisive, lukewarm, and slothful nature. It intimates something entire, decisive, and animated. Whilst nature's strength decays therefore, and our own strength becomes weakness, may we go forward in the strength of the Lord, until he lead us to a happy transition from time into eternity, where we shall be for ever with him, and praise him through endless ages! Amen.

XLV.

EZION-GABER.

NUMB. xxxiii. 35.

“ And they departed from Ebronah, and encamped at Ezion-gaber.”

THIS encampment was distant about thirty-five miles from the previous one. With respect to its situation, it lay parallel with Alush, the ninth encampment, and no further from it than from Ebronah. In thirty-eight years, therefore, they had apparently made no further progress than in the first half year ! Yet in reality, they had proceeded much further. They had attained to a painful knowledge of themselves, as well as experienced many proofs of the Lord's power, goodness, and faithfulness. They were, at least in my opinion, much poorer, meaner, and more self-despairing than when at Alush. I dare not, however, assert, that they were become more believing, obedient, and devoted ; although we may hope that such was the case, since nothing to their disadvantage has been mentioned for a long period. If whilst at Ezion-gaber, they drew comparisons with their circumstances at Alush, how very different much,

if not every thing, would appear to them ! And is not this also the case with us, after having walked for a period in the ways of godliness ? Yet still “ Ebenezer ! ” hitherto the Lord hath helped us ! “ Forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forth unto those that are before.”

They now found themselves, for the third time, at the shores of the Red Sea, and after tracing a semi-circular route along the borders of Moab, they reach, after some time, the strand of this remarkable sea for the fourth time, but only in passing from Zalmonah to Punon. We have seen from 1 Cor. x. that the Red Sea is a type of the baptismal covenant, or a being buried with Christ by baptism into death ; the mortification of the old man with his affections and lusts, as well as a being raised up together with Christ to newness of life.

Besides baptism, the Red Sea is a representative of the superabundant measure in which the blessings of the covenant of grace are poured out in the days of the New Testament, by which the purification of the soul from sin, and its renovation into the divine image is accomplished. What object more precious can we contemplate therefore than this Red Sea ? Will it be sufficient to view it only four times, or ought we not rather to be continually encamped upon its shores ? We ought continually to revert to Christ, and reasonably never depart from him a moment, but abide in him, that we may bring forth much fruit to the glory of God the Father ; since without him we can do nothing.

Ezion-gaber, at least in later times, was a sea-port, where vessels found a safe harbour, and where Solomon

and Jehoshaphat built ships, and sent them to Ophir for gold. This was also the furthest point of distance from the promised land, and from hence they directed their course to the western part of Canaan. Here it was that the Lord sent them word by Moses, saying, "The Lord thy God knoweth, or hath taken to heart, thy walking through this great wilderness." (Deut. ii. 7.) They had long wandered about Mount Seir; until at length the Lord said, it was enough, and sent them this consoling message.

Let us now briefly consider the import of the name of this encampment, which consists of two words, Ezion and Gaber, and we give the preference to that interpretation which renders it by "counsel of strength." The latter word is the same which is applied to the wondrous child, which is born to us, and is called in Isaiah ix. "the mighty God," and also in Psalm xlv. where it is said, "Gird on thy sword, O thou most Mighty!" The first word is also applied to him by Isaiah in the same connection, where he is called "Counsellor." Here both names appear in one, "counsel of strength," or powerful counsellor, and thus denotes something as desirable, as it is needful, useful, and encouraging.

The name Ezion, as implying counsel, reminds us of necessity and experience, and encourages confidence and reliance. What a necessity for counsel did the Hebrews feel in their wanderings, which increased as they approached Canaan! How much was still to be endured, how many difficulties to be overcome, how many enemies to be conquered, who far exceeded them in strength and knowledge of war, and compared with whom they were only as a swarm of ants or grasshop-

pers. To this was added their folly ; since Moses was compelled to tell them that to that hour they had not attained to an understanding heart. How often were they in circumstances where they knew not how to help themselves, and might be placed again in similar circumstances ! They were still far from Canaan, surrounded by embittered and powerful foes, Edom, Moab, and Ammon, who were already whetting their swords. Aaron and Miriam died soon after, and even Moses himself.

Such was the situation of the Israelites ; and are we in reality less in need of counsel than they ? We shall not think so, if we measure ourselves aright, and are convinced, that though in different circumstances, we are in a similar situation, and before we are aware, may not know which way to turn. How necessary is it, therefore, to have a wise and trusty counsellor always at hand to advise us how to act both in spiritual and temporal things ! How shall we be able to stand ? How avoid missing the way ? How defend ourselves against our subtle and powerful adversaries, and attain the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus ? Happy are we, if placed in circumstances to feel our need of such a counsellor, and still happier, when we continually resort to him and hear his voice behind us, saying, “ This is the way, walk ye in it ! ”

And how often had Israel already experienced his aid and counsel ! How much had they already passed through ! so that even Moses said, “ The Lord thy God bare thee through the wilderness as a man beareth his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came unto this place.” What aid have we not received both spiritually and temporally ? When no way of escape

appeared, he showed us an outlet. Darkness was made light before us, and crooked things straight.

The experience of this ought to produce hope and confidence. In whom? In him whose name is Counsellor and Mighty God. We have long wandered in the desert, so that all trust in our own wisdom and strength ought reasonably to have departed. Now such was the intention of the cross and circuitous path of the Israelites, and in order also that all that was in their hearts should be made manifest. We ought likewise to become so humbled, as to deem ourselves unworthy of entering the promised land, and ascribe it merely to the Lord's faithfulness in fulfilling his promise. The object would be then pretty well attained, and will be manifest in the degree in which you cleave solely to the Lord, and not to yourselves, but trust in him who says, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

This confidence enables us to cast all our care upon him who careth for us, as a father for his beloved child; and whatever supports may be removed or enemies appear, yet we go forward in his strength, making mention of his righteousness, and of that only.

XLVI.

KADESH.

NUMB. xxxiii. 36.

“And they removed from Ezion-gaber, and pitched in the wilderness of Zin, which is Kadesh.”

THIS thirty-second encampment is some days' journey distant from the former, and approaches the promised land. The silence observed respecting the children of Israel, during the long period of thirty-eight years, is at length broken. History again opens its mouth, but only to continue its old lamentations.

Let us first attend to the meaning of the word Zin. This word has three significations. First, it signifies coldness, which in the East is an image of refreshment, because of the great heat, and hence a cool shade is particularly refreshing and agreeable. And how pleasant it is, when Christ, as the Good Shepherd, “leads us into green pastures and by the still waters,

and restoreth our souls." If the sun does not always shine, neither does it constantly rain, blow, or thunder. There are also verdant spots in the wilderness, which look the more lovely, because of being surrounded with so much sterility.

But Zin also certainly signifies thorns. In this signification it occurs in the fifty-fifth verse of this chapter, where the Lord says to the Israelites, "If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides." The world is full of thorns and thistles, and we have great need of a Noah, "to comfort us for all our toil and labour upon earth, which the Lord hath cursed." We do not here speak of natural thorns, nor solely of the various sufferings with which this life is interwoven, and which often shoot up unexpectedly. We refer more particularly to the curse, which by sin has come upon all flesh, and which is the source of every sorrow, vexation, misfortune, and mournful event, which menaces, and frequently pervades, in various forms, this earthly life.

We mean the curse which renders everything, even the excellent gifts of God, a bane to man, so that one individual perishes through prosperity, as another through adversity; the one being seduced through riches to pride, the other through poverty to meanness, deceit, and robbery, and both to forgetfulness of God. To how many have distinguished talents been like loaded fire-arms to children! The most beautiful of the serpent tribe are often the most poisonous, and tigers wear the handsomest skin.

Do not we walk in the wilderness of Zin, amongst thorns as signs of the curse, when we look around us either at social, moral, or religious life? Look at the heavens; what a terrific dress do they not sometimes assume! Storms roar through the air in savage fury, as if they would make the whole earth a plain, and the sea into a mountain. Forked lightnings remind us how insecure our life and property are. Dreadful thunders complete the horror. Whole forests are stripped of their verdure, the corn-fields ravaged by hail, and the hope of a year blasted in half an hour. Instead of a gentle shower, the reservoirs of heaven seem to burst, and repeat the desolations of the flood. Rivers burst their bounds, carrying death and destruction along with them. One year, the sun withholds his beams; another, the clouds their rain. And what is the cause of it all? The curse under which earth groans, and from which we ought to seek deliverance.

Shall we contemplate the effects of the curse still further, and examine the abodes of sickness and sorrow? Our eye refuses for a moment to look, and our ear to listen. The softest couch can become too hard for thee; the choicest food, disgusting. Behold how many are exclaiming, "When I lie down, I say, when shall I arise, and the night be gone;" and in the morning, when will it be evening? "My soul chooseth strangling and death rather than life." And in this howling wilderness death reigns, and walks about blasting all the joys of life, and mocking the art of the physician. What sufferings also in social life from the vile tempers of those around us, losses in business, &c., and finally, what a curse prevails in a

moral and religious respect! What a list of the blackest crimes and vices does the history of mankind present, and how grossly does evil manifest itself on every hand! How corrupt the examples which are frequently set, how bold the blasphemy and deceit that is promulgated! If this be not the wilderness of Zin, where is it to be found? And to complete the misery, many even turn the law and the gospel into a curse by their abuse of them. Instead of the law serving to bring them to Christ, they go about with the works of the law, and thus continue under the curse. Instead of being allured by the gospel, they become enemies to it, and even seek to prevent others from entering into the kingdom of heaven. Thus we wander in a thorny wilderness; but happy is he who does not sow under thorns; and through faith in him who dwelt in the bush, is redeemed from the curse, and translated into a state, where every thing becomes a blessing to him.

If wandering through the desert be something so dangerous, and to many so destructive, we must observe that the word Zin has a third and better meaning, since it may also be rendered, "a great shield." Thus David uses the word in Psalm v. 12, "with favour wilt thou compass the righteous as with a shield;" and when this is the case, who can penetrate through such a defence? If any one asks how the same word can mean a thorn and shield at the same time, or offence and defence, the answer is easy. The disposition of the individual causes a different effect to be produced. Thus, give wine to the weak, and it will strengthen him, whilst it acts as poison to one in a fever. Temp-

tation destroys the wicked, but purifies the godly. The same gospel is the savour of death unto one, and of life to the other.

But woe unto him, who walks without this defence ! He will not only be lacerated by the poisonous thorns, but be also mortally wounded by the fatal arrows of the lurking wicked one, yea, the divine indignation will consume him, and the curse devour him.

Has the man this shield in himself ? Yes, if he is a Christian. "He that is born of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." He that is in him is greater than he that is in the world. "Ye are strong, and have overcome the wicked one." "He that is born of God sinneth not." But he is only safe as long as he abides in Christ his fortress. He that dreams of being safe without him, will awake in the horrors of destruction.

And what is the true shield ? The cross of Christ, from which, as from an impenetrable shield, every arrow rebounds. Thus is the church of God encamped in the wilderness of Zin—on one side the thorns ; on the other the sure defence. It is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, on which hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men. The Wonderful, the Counsellor, the mighty God is its shield, even Christ. This shield may, therefore, well be called Kadesh—that is holiness. It is composed of the gold of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. If any one is in Christ, and abides in him, he is safe. "Who is it, therefore, that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners ?" Believe

with all your strength on Jesus Christ. “Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life;” who can preserve you blameless, and present you spotless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. Amen.

FINIS.



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